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THE DRAWING-ROOM PLAYLETS FOR AMATEURS

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ROBERT ARTHUR DILLON

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Dillon, Robert Arthur.
Drawing-room playlets
for amateurs.

Kirtorke S. Company

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**THE DRAWING-ROOM PLAYLETS
FOR AMATEURS.**

**SRI JAGADGURU VISHWARADHYA
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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Prince's Predicament
—A ROMANTIC COMEDY—
By ROBERT ARTHUR DILLON

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Strand, W.C.

THE DRAWING-ROOM PLAYLETS FOR AMATEURS

- No. 1—THE TRUTHFUL AGE
„ 2—THE MATCHMAKERS
„ 3—AN ARTFUL OLD CARD
„ 4—"CHAWLIE" SIKES
„ 5—PRIDE

BY
ROBERT ARTHUR DILLON
Author of
"The Prince's Predicament."

London
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First published in 1914.

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[To produce any of these plays in *public*, permission must first be obtained from Messrs. GREENING & Co. Essex Street, Strand, London, W.C. at least a fortnight in advance of the date of the performance.]

PREFACE

The purpose of this book is to provide a comprehensive treatment of the theory of groups, with particular emphasis on the finite groups. The book is written for students of mathematics and for researchers in the field. It is divided into two parts. The first part, which is the main body of the book, is devoted to the theory of groups. The second part, which is a collection of exercises, is devoted to the applications of the theory of groups to other areas of mathematics. The book is written in a clear and concise style, and it contains many examples and exercises. The book is a valuable resource for students and researchers alike.

PREFACE

Having repeatedly been asked for short plays suitable for drawing-room or platform performances, and not requiring more than one, or, at most, two male characters, I venture to hope that the following light-comedy sketches will meet with favour from those desirous of producing short plays—lasting from twenty to twenty-five minutes—and suitable for drawing-room, or platform entertainments, where no special scenery is available. All these sketches have been “tried,” and in every case have proved successful. Full directions have been given with each play, and whenever a door R.C. back or L.C. back is promulgated, a “door” R. or L. can be equally well substituted

THE AUTHOR.

THE TRUTHFUL AGE

A Radical Comedy in one Act

By J. M. Barrie

DRAMATIS PERSONA

THE TRUTHFUL AGE

THE TRUTHFUL AGE

THE TRUTHFUL AGE

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THE TRUTHFUL AGE

A Farcical Comedy in one Act

(Must be Played very Briskly).

CHARACTERS :

MRS. JUVENAL *(a middle-aged widow).*

MAY *(her daughter).*

BRIDGET *(her kitchen-maid).*

MR. RATOLIFF *(a middle-aged widower).*

CHARLIE WARREN *(a rising young artist).*

SCENE :

Mrs. Juvenal's sitting-room in Suburbia. Small table with draw, R.C. a little up. Easy chair L.C. Chairs back and L. of table. Bell C. back. Window R. Doors R. and L. Note.—May is dressed as a girl of sixteen—short skirt and hair down her back.

At rise of curtain, May is seated back of table sketching ; Charles Warren standing behind, teaching her.

Chas. Another touch there, May ! Just a shade darker—there, that's it. *(Xing R. of table).* Now I must be off as you have had your full hour and—*(looks at watch)*—considerably more.

May *(pouting).* Oh, I know ! You're tired of my society already and are simply longing to get away.

Chas. No, no, May! But if Mrs. Juvenal should return she might wonder why I'm still lingering here—after your lesson-hour was over—and she's none too friendly with me as it is (*down R.C.*).

May (*rising petulantly*). A mere excuse! (*down C.*). It's only because you—you wish to get away—from me.

Chas (*ardently*). Maisie, you know that's not true—you know that I—(*breaks off, drops her hand*).

May (*artlessly*). Well; why do you stop?

Chas. You're right—I must be going (*turns off to R.*).

May. Come back! I didn't mean that. Why don't you finish what you were about to say?

Chas. (*turning impetuously*). Do you really wish to hear it? But, no—I mustn't. After all, you're only a child!

May (*archly*). A child! Well, I wouldn't let a little thing like that hinder me (*placing chair down C.*). But if your conscience pricks you to that extent, you may imagine for the moment that I'm a grown up young lady (*sits, poses herself*). So, now, go ahead and finish that sentence you began.

Chas. (*dubiously*). I—I don't know if it's right, but—. Well, if you were a grown-up young lady, I would put a finishing touch to the picture by—

May (*pouting*). The picture! That's not what I asked for. I wanted—

Chas. I wasn't alluding to your sketch, May, but to your own sweet little self. And the finishing touch is just three little words.

May (*demurely*). And they are——?

Chas. (*stammering*). I—I—I—

May (*rising*). Three I's ! Is that all ? Now, if I'd been in your place, it would have been U—U—U.

Chas. (*excited*). You would, May ? You mean——

May. I mean that two of your eyes—I should say, your two eyes—have already told me that——

Chas (*jubilantly*). You know it, then ! (*about to embrace her*). You know that I love——

Mrs. J. (*outside*) (*calling*). Jane ! (*Then footsteps heard coming*).

May (*startled*). Mother ! She's coming—you must fly (*hurries him to door R.*). Wait outside in the garden, and I'll call you from the window when she's gone.

Chas. But how about the finishing touch ?

May. No time now ! If Ma discovers you here, she'll finish you instead !

Chas. Now or never (*kisses her*). I love you—even if you are only a child. [*Exit R. quickly*].

May (*laughing mockingly*). Even if I am only a child !

[*Enter Mrs. J. in outdoor costume*].

Mrs. J. (*severely*). Oh, you're here ! What are you laughing at ? And who was that I heard talking with you just before I entered ?

May (*c.*). N—Nobody, ma.

Mrs. J. (*L.C.*) Nobody ? May, I do wish you would learn to speak the truth. It's becoming outrageous ! Only a few minutes ago, Mrs. Gerling informed me that she saw you yesterday climbing our

apple-tree—a thing you know I disapprove of—and you told me you hadn't been out of doors all day.

May. Out of our grounds I meant, ma !

Mrs. J. (sitting L.C.) That's nothing but prevarication pure and simple. For the future I want the truth from you—the literal truth—and nothing but the truth. Now, who was with you ?

May. Nobody—

Mrs. J. May ! !

May (continuing)—of any importance. Only Mr. Warren, the drawing-master.

Mrs. J. Oh ! What was he doing here so late ?—your lesson-hour was over more than three-quarters-of-an-hour ago.

May (placing sketching materials in drawer) (lamely). Well, we—hadn't quite finished—that is, we were putting a finishing touch to the—

Mrs. J. (rising, sternly). Enough, May ! You're already ignoring what I've just said. That young man wouldn't stay past his time unless there was some attraction to keep him here.

May (down C. ; innocently). Why, what could there be ?

Mrs. J. (X R.C.). Well, there's yourself, for instance ! I hope you're not encouraging him to make a fool of himself ?

May (demurely). No, ma ! He'll never make a *fool* of himself over me. Besides, you forget, I'm supposed to be only a school-girl.

Mrs. J. (hastily). Oh, yes, of course ! Still, young

men have been known to fall in love, even with school-girls. And if anything of that sort is taking place I shall stop your drawing-lessons, give him his *congé*, and forbid him the house.

May (L.C.). Well, he's never told me he's in love with me, ma, and that's the literal truth.

Mrs. J. (mollified). Then mind he never does. And in future remember to be strictly veracious to everyone (*sits L. of table ; removes her hat*).

May (spreading out her skirts). How can you expect me to be truthful when you know that, daily, I'm a living falsehood.

Mrs. J. (calmly). Oh, *that*—that couldn't be helped. It was purely accidental. As I've told you before, the mistake arose when I was first introduced to Mr. Ratcliff—last year—when you were abroad finishing your education. The conversation happened to turn on the subject of ages. He informed me at the time that he was forty-two, and——

May (indignantly). Forty-two ! Fifty-two, more like. Why, he's almost bald !

Mrs. J. (severely). Baldness isn't necessarily a sign of old-age ! And, May, allow me to remind you that it's rude to interrupt your mother while she's speaking.

May (with an air of resignation). Sorry, ma ! Go on ! He said he was forty-two——? (*sits L.C.*).

Mrs. J. And though I distinctly told him I was forty-three, he misunderstood, and thought I said thirty-four. I didn't discover his mistake till some time after, and then I considered it too late to correct him.

May (grumbling). So I've had to suffer for your—— for his mistake. Four years off my life, while you have added nine on to yours.

Mrs. J. I didn't add it on—I took it off.

May. You know what I mean ! I've been deprived of, at least, one year of society, and ——

Mrs. J. Well, it's no use grumbling about it now. You see, it would never have done to disclose my real age after Mr. Ratcliff had begun to be *friendly*.

May. Why not ? What has that got to do with it ?

Mrs. J. (rising ; emphatically). Everything ! So I couldn't very well tell him I had a daughter of nineteen, without making it appear that I was married at fourteen—which would be absurd—so I *had* to say you were fifteen.

May (rises ; saunters to window). Beastly hard luck, I call it (*glances out, then comes down R.*).

Mrs. J. Never, mind, May ! Next year you shall put up your hair, and I'll give you a good time, provided you keep your promise and don't let him know that I'm older than he (*c.*).

May. All right, ma, I won't.

Mrs. J. That's a good little girl. Now I must get ready to receive him, as he's coming to tea this afternoon.

May (dismayed). Coming to tea ? (*aside*)—Oh, hang it all.

Mrs. J. (sharply). That's what I said ! So ring for Jane, and tell her to have some buttered-toast made, and to bring in the fresh cake I ordered (*L.C.*).

May (R.C.). But it's Jane's afternoon off, so there's only Bridget, the kitchen-maid, to wait on us.

Mrs. J. (in a tone of disgust). That slovenly creature, again! How provoking! Well, you must see about the toast and cake yourself. And tell that idle gawk to bring in the proper tea-things this time—not one large breakfast-cup with two small tea-cups—or a fish-knife to cut the cake with.

May. All right, ma!

Mrs. J. (at door L.). And also tell her to smarten herself up. I can't stand her untidyness much longer. Even Mr. Ratcliff remarked upon it when he was here last. [*Exit L.*]

May. Very well! (c.). Hang old Ratcliff! If it hadn't been for him I should now be taking my proper place in society, instead of being treated as a child (X L.C.). And all because he's become friendly with mother (*dawning on her*)—Friendly! Oh! (*rushes to window, beckons, then down R.C.*) Is that what she means? How blind I've been! Not if I know it! I don't want a step-father, and I won't have one—Ah, unless—

[*Enter Chas., R., furtively.*]

Chas. Coast clear, May?

May. All right for a minute or two. But, Charlie, I've just discovered such a dreadful thing—something awful!

Chas. (coming c. with her). Why, what is it?

May. Old Mr. Ratcliff's making the running for me—or rather, ma is running after him—which means, I

shall be landed with a step-father if I'm not careful. And he's coming to tea this afternoon—to propose, most likely.

Chas. (surprised). You don't say so !

May (R. of him). It's a fact ! And I'm wondering how I can prevent it without making myself highly disagreeable.

Chas. I should think you'd find *that* rather difficult Maisie.

May (sighs). Oh, I don't know ! Even ma says I'm a little trying at times—*(archly)*—so you will know what to expect, Master Charles.

Chas. (smiling). Oh, I'm not afraid !

May (seriously). But really, Charlie, you shouldn't make me out better than I am. Why, only a few minutes ago, mother was slanging me like anything for not always adhering strictly to the truth.

Chas. (surprised). You, May ! But you're the most candid little person I ever met. I don't believe you could tell a real fib if you tried.

May. Er—perhaps not ! *(X L.C.)* But sometimes one's obliged to add a little colouring, if only for the sake of peace or politeness.

Chas. Oh, that's different—society inexactitudes don't count—*(opening his arms)*—And now, just one, darling, before—

May (roguishly). A fib ?

Chas. No ! A kiss !

May. But you mustn't !

Chas. Why not ?

May. Mother says she's going to sack you if you make a fool of yourself.

Chas. (*puzzled*). What do you mean ?

May. Fall in love with me ! It's considered the same thing, you know.

Chas. (*embracing her*). Then everyone who marries for love, must be a fool. Well, I would rather be a fool with you for my little wife than the wisest man alive with any other woman.

[*Enter Mrs. J., L., stands aghast*].

May (*kissing him*). Well, it is nicer that way, isn't it, darling ? But you had better be off now, or ma——

Mrs. J. (*furiously*). May !—(*they jump apart*)—You bad wicked child ! (X.C.). Mr. Warren, what does this mean ?

May (L.C.). It's all my fault, ma——

Chas. (R.C.). No, Mrs. Juvenal, it's mine ! Let me explain : I love your daughter——

Mrs. J. I daresay you do, sir ; but if you imagine for one instant that I'm going to accept you—a drawing master—as my son-in-law, you'll find yourself vastly mistaken. And to think that you should dare to kiss my child——

May. But it was I who was kissing him——

Mrs. J. Silence, miss ! You should be ashamed to confess such a thing.

May. But you told me always to speak the truth ! (*turns up*).

Mrs. J. Another word, and I'll send you to your room.

May. Then who will see to the toast and cake for Mr. Ratcliff?

Mrs. J. Leave the room this minute!

May. All right, ma! (*Exits door L.*)

Mrs. J. As for you, Mr. Warren, who have had the audacity to take such liberties with my daughter in my own house, your *wages* shall be paid in full to to-day, and your services will no longer be required (*up L.C.*). I must fetch my purse, but you won't be kept waiting a moment longer than I can help.

Chas. (R.C.). Very well, Mrs. Juvenal. But I think if you would listen to me for a——

Mrs. J. (at door L.). I won't listen to another word, sir. I've already heard more than enough, and seen much more of you than was desirable. [*Exits*].

Chas. (annoyed). Good lor', what an awful climax—and just as everything was looking so rosy and going so splendidly.

[*Re-enter May, L.*].

The deuce take——May! You back!

May. (laughing X.C.). Oh, I know how to dodge mother—dodged behind the door as she came out! But run away, now, Charlie—quick, scoot—I'm going to see if I can't bring her to terms.

Chas. Why! How?

May. Never mind now! Go! No; not that way—garden, same as before—and wait (*drags him off to R.*).

Chas. But she's gone to get my wages ! (*laughs*).

May (*impatiently*). Oh, do be off ; or you'll spoil everything.

Chas. All right, sweetheart—here goes ! [*Exit quickly R.*]

May (*relieved*). Thank goodness ! (*rings bell C. back*) (*coming R.C.*), Now, for a tussle when mother returns !

[*Enter Bridget, L., in her kitchen garb, sleeves rolled up, and polishing a brown shoe with a cloth.*]

May (*stands amazed*). Good gracious !

Brid. (*L.C.*). Did yer ring for me, Miss ?

May (*R.C.*). Heavens, Bridget ! What have you been doing ?

Brid. Shure, a-claning of the kitchen stove, and blackening yer shoes with the brown crame, Miss—as yer can see for yerself.

May. But don't you know the tea will be wanted in a few minutes ? And you can't bring it in in that state.

Brid. (*cheerfully*). Faith, an' it isn't a minute I'll be after changing into me company clothes, if that's all that's troubling yer !

May. But you could'nt possibly get ready in time ! And mamma particularly told me to tell you you were to smarten up for this afternoon. Even Mr. Ratcliff remarked on your—er—dowdy appearance and awkward manner the last time he was here—and he's coming again to-day.

Brid. (*C., grimly*). Mr. Ratcliff, is it ? Him that's

kaping company with your ma, miss ! An' what has me parsonal appearance to do with the loikes of him—will yer tell me that now ?

May (indifferently). Oh, I know nothing about it ! It's only what Mother told me (*turns off to R.*).

Brid. Ah, the misthress told yer that ! And other things about me as well, I warrant, if the truth was only known. Can yer deny it, miss ?

May (grinning). Oh, the truth. No, I can't truthfully say I can. She not only said you were a slovenly creature, but——

Brid. (bridling). Slovenly creature, indade !

May. But also an idle gawk.

Brid. (polishing shoe violently). Idle, begor ! Me that works me fingers to the bone, kaping her dhirty house clane.

May. It's not my fault, Bridget ! You asked——

Brid. (L.C.) Shure, an' its not blaming you I am, miss ! (*With righteous indignation*). But when the misthress returns——

[*Enter Mrs. J., L., with purse*].

Mrs. J. Why, what do you mean by coming in this room in that condition, Bridget ? Begone at once ! (*comes C.*).

Brid. Not till I've had a word or two with yer first, mum.

Mrs. J. Such impertinence ! I refuse to speak to you here. Leave the room immediately (*turns to R.*). May, what's become of that young man ? I don't see him.

May. (R.). I suppose he's left, as he's not here, ma.

Mrs. J. (*acidly*). I suppose he has, or he would be here still. When I ask you a question——

Brid. (*at Mrs. J.'s elbow*). About that word, mum?

Mrs. J. (*turning, angrily*). What, haven't you gone, after I ordered you to? (*X. L.C.*).

Brid. (C.). Not yet, mum! Shure, the slovenly crathure is still here, as yer can see for yerself.

Mrs. J. (*aghast*). What's the matter with you? Are you off your head?

Brid. No, it's on me fate I am—every minute of the day in your service, mum. Me, the idle gawk!

Mrs. J. (*sinking into chair L.C.*). May, you wicked girl, you've been repeating my words to this wretched—Fenian.

Brid. Faynian, is it I am, now?

May (*humbly*). I only followed your instructions, ma. I'm sorry if I did wrong (*turns up to window*).

Mrs. J. You aggravating child, you're doing it on purpose to annoy me——

Brid. 'Dade, an' I'm thinking it's yerself that's the aggravating woman, mum—throwing things in people's faces behind their backs.

Mrs. J. (*in despair*). Oh, this is too much!

Brid. That's what I say, mum; so I gives yer warning that I'll lave the house this instant.

Mrs. J. (*rising, furiously*). Go, then! (*points to door L.*) Go at once, and a good riddance, too!

Brid. All right, I'm off, as soon as yer pay me me wages, one pound, two and sixpence 'a'penny, and

mighty little it is for all I've done for yer.

[*Enter Mr. Ratcliff, L.*].

Mrs. J. (L.C.) I shan't pay you a single penny, you impertinent creature (*turns to L.*). Oh, Mr. Ratcliff, I'm so glad you've come.

Mr. R. How do you do. . . But, bless my soul, you appear to be in trouble, dear Mrs. Juvenal?

Mrs. J. (hastily producing handkerchief.) I am, Mr. Ratcliff, I am!

Mr. R. (consolingly.) There, there! Don't cry! What's the matter?

Brid. (C.). Me wages, mum, or I'll have the law on yer!

Mr. R. Ah, the servant problem, again. Leave it to me, my dear lady I will settle her. (*X.L. of Brid.*)

Brid. (turning.) D'yer mean ye'll settle with me? (*He recoils.*)

Mr R. N---Not exactly. I meant settle the question (*magisterially*). Now—er— don't you think that if you took a minute or two to cool down a bit, which you would find easier to do outside than here, we—er— might then come to some arrangement which would be satisfactory both to your mistress and yourself, my good woman?

Brid. (ironically.) An' is it meself that's now yer good woman. Faith, an' I thought it was the misthress there. But perhaps it is yer so sthruck with me parsonal appearance this time, that yer mane to give her the go-bye, and take me in her stead? (*bobs.*)

Mr. R. (recoiling aghast). Mrs. J.—Juvenal, what does she mean ?

Mrs. J. (sits L.C. sobs). I—I don't know ! It's all that horrid May's fault.

May (at window). I only did what ma told me to.

Mr. R. Don't give way so, dearest Mrs. Juvenal. Let me ring for some tea ? A cup will do you good ; and in the meanwhile I'll send one of the servants for the police to turn this person out (*turns up*).

Brid. Shure, then, it's meself you'll have to send.

Mrs. J. It's no use ringing, Mr. Ratcliff—there's no one to answer the bell. Jane is out, and the cook left us last Monday. So I'm afraid we'll all have to forego our tea for to-day. I hope you don't mind ?

Mr. R. (gallantly). To be in your company, alone, dear Mrs. Juvenal, is more than sufficient compensation.

Brid. (contemptuously). Troth, an' I've no wish to watch yer spooning, so I'll go and pack me box (*X door L., turns, then throws shoe down, C. stage*). An' there's for luck when yer married to her. I don't think ! [*Exits L.*].

[*Mrs. J. and Mr. R. look at each other, confused. May laughs*].

Mrs. J. (Xing R.C.). Stop that hyæna's laugh, you wretched girl, and leave the room at once, do you hear ?

May (meekly). Yes, ma ! (*turns off to L. slowly, but returns to window directly Mrs. J's. back is turned*).

Mr. R. (mopping his brow). Good heavens ! What did the woman mean ?

Mrs. J. (*R.C., simpering*). I—I can't say ! But,—I suppose she has noticed—some things.

Mr. R. (*L.C.*). She thinks we are engaged ?

Mrs. J. Well—it did seem like it, didn't it ?

Mr. R. (*X.C.*). Bless my soul, I never suspected that anyone had guessed my intentions towards you, dear Mrs. Juvenal (*reaches for her hand*).

Mrs. J. (*turning her head away, coyly*). Oh, Mr. Ratcliff, do you mean that—that you care for me ?

May (*pantomining*). Ma, you bad, wicked——

Mr. R. No doubt it seems rather sudden to you, my sweet lady ! Though if you would but deign to look favourably on your unworthy suitor, what's there to prevent our early union taking place ?

May (*coming down R.C.*). There's me, Mr. Ratcliff. You seems to have forgotten about me.

Mrs. J. (*aghast*). You, May, I thought you had gone (*X.L.C.*)

Mr. R. (*aside*). So did I—confound her !

May (*R., aggressively*). Yes, Mr. Ratcliff, you had forgotten me.

Mrs. J. (*aside to Mr. R.*). For goodness's sake, try to pacify her, or there'll be more trouble. I don't know what's come over her.

Mr. R. (*dismayed*). But I——

Mrs. J. (*hastily*). In the meanwhile I'll see if I can't get you some tea. [*Exits quickly L.*]

Mr. R. But—— (*aside*). Dear me, what a task ! And she looks such an aggressive young woman,

May. (R.C.). Well, have you anything to say, Mr. Ratcliff ?

Mr. R. (C.). Nothing, my dear—nothing ! Only why should you object to me as a step-father ?

May (X.L.C.). Oh, I'm not objecting to you in particular ; but I'm averse to all step-fathers as a—class !

Mr. R. Bless me ; you allude to them as if they were a specie of wild-beast.

May. So they are—most of them—to their step-daughters.

Mr. R. Oh, not so bad as that, I trust ! Now, is there no way by which I can gain your favour—your approval ?

May (decisively). No way, but one.

Mr. R. (relieved). Ah, what is it ? A little more pocket-money, or——

May (bluntly). Obtain Ma's consent to my engagement to Charlie Warren.

Mr. R. (laughing ironically). Heavens ! A child of your age contemplating matrimony. I never heard of anything so absurd.

May (indignantly). I've as much right to contemplate matrimony at my age as you have at yours.

Mr. R. What, when I've already had twenty-five year's experience, while you've had none (*turns off*).

May starts, makes rapid calculation).

May (sweetly). Twenty-five, Mr. Ratcliff ? And you've been a widower for three years, I believe ?

Mr. R. Yes, yes ; but what's that to do with——

May. Only that you must have been married at fourteen, if the age you told mother was correct.

Mr. R. (perturbed, aside). Oh, lor'! What have I done?

May. And as that is absurd on the face of it, I can only conclude that you have wilfully misled poor mother.

Mr. R. No, no; I assure you—it was a mistake—she must have misunderstood——

May. Of course, that's possible; but she may think otherwise when I tell her your real age. And if she considers that you've deceived her, she'll——

Mr. R. (imploring). But May—sweet May—darling May—why tell her? Why say anything about it?

May (sternly). And have me conceal the truth—when you know how very strict she is about it?

Mr. R. No, no; but—er—there's no necessity to mention it unless you're asked.

May (R.). Well, if I agree to do this for you, Mr. Ratcliff, it can only be on condition that you persuade ma to let me have Charlie.

Mr. R. But suppose I can't (*turns off to L.*).

May. Then——(*gesticulates*).

[*Enter Mrs. J., with small tray, on which there is one small cup*].

Mrs. J. (entering L.). The tea, Mr. Ratcliff! I've managed to make you a cup —(*aside to him*)—Well, were you successful?

Mr. R. (flurried). I don't know—I can't tell—I'd better go——

Mrs. J. (L.C., amazed). Why, what's the matter ?

Mr. R. (Xing L.). Nothing—only I must be off

Mrs. J. (sinking into chair L.C., with tray on her lap). You don't mean you're going to—to jilt me ? Oh, I see ; this is more of that wretched child's work. Why did I leave you alone with her ? I might have known—
(sobs).

Mr. R. (L. of her). Dear Mrs. Juvenal, I see no hope for us, unless——

Mrs. J. Unless what, dear Mr. Ratcliff ?

Mr. R. Unless you consent to her engagement with a person of the name of Warren.

Mrs. J. (sitting up, indignantly). Marry a common drawing-master ? Never !

May (R.C.). All right, ma ; then I won't have Mr. Ratcliff for a step-father.

Mrs. J. (rising) : You shall ! We will get married without any interference from you, Miss (*places tray on table*).

May (quietly). I think not.

Mrs. J. What can you do ? You're not going to break your promise ?

May. No. But Mr. Ratcliff is on my side. (*To Mr. R.*)—Dear Mr. Ratcliff, do please use your influence with mother——

Mr. R. (hastily). Dearest lady, don't you think you had better let her have her way, and then you won't be worried with her any longer ?

Mrs. J. (severely). You don't know what you're

saying, Mr. Ratcliff! (*Xing L.C.*)—You are not her mother.

Mr. R. (following her, aside). No, thank goodness, I'm not—(*aloud*)—but——

Mrs. J. (Xing R.C.). I know what is best for her!

Mr. R. (following her): But is it best for us?

Mrs. J. (Xing L.C.). That's taking a selfish view of the subject, Mr. Ratcliff.

Mr. R. (same bus). I know you're the soul of unselfishness, dear Mrs. Jevvna, but in this case——

Mrs. J. (halting C.). In any case I must do my duty.

May (at window). Then it's no use Charlie waiting any longer, ma?

Mrs. J. (amazed). He's been waiting?

May. Yes; in the garden—for his wages, and me.

Mrs. J. (about to X. R.). Then I'll very soon send him about his business.

May. (stepping down R.). In that case, ma, it becomes my painful duty to inform you that Mr. Ratcliff——

Mr. R. (flying to door L.). Good-bye, Mrs. Juvenal! Sorry I can't wait—quite forgot I had a most pressing engagement (*opens door*).

Mrs. J. Mr. Ratcliff——

[*Enter Brid., L., collides with Mr. R. She is arrayed in a gaudy costume and large hat.*]

Mr. R. Good heavens!

Mrs. J. (X. L.C.). Bridget, don't let him escape!

Brid. (*mounting guard over door*). I won't, mum, if yer pay me me wages !

Mrs. J. I will, Bridget, I will.

Brid. Thank ye, koindly, mum !

May (*R.C.*). Best change your mind, ma. You see that a word from me——

Mr. R. (*imploring*). Consent, darling lady, I implore you, or we part to meet no more.

Mrs. J. (*aghast* *C.*). No, no, anything but that !

May (*overjoyed*). Then you agree, mother ?

Mrs. J. Yes—have your way. But——

May. Hurrah ! (*rushes to window, beckons*).

Mr. R. Hurrah ! (*embraces Mrs. J.*)

May. Bridget, remove that tray, and bring in some fresh tea.

Brid. (*going up C. back*). But shure an' I've left the house, Miss !

May. Oh, no, you haven't—and you mustn't. It was all my fault that you got into trouble, but I wish you to remain.

Brid. (*coming down to table*). Well, Miss, as ye've always trated me dacent-like, I'll stay (*Xing L, with tray, aside*)—An, it's moighty plazed I'll be to get back into me working clothes, which are a dale more comfortable than these holiday togs. [*Exit L.C.*].

(*Enter Chas., R., furtively*).

Chas. All clear, May ?—(*sees others*)—Oh !

May (*R.*). It's all right, Charlie ! Ma has graciously given her consent to our engagement.

Chas. (surprised). What !

Mrs. J. (L.C.). Come in, Mr. Warren ! On second thoughts I've changed my mind ; and as you're to be my son-in-law I must see something of you.

Chas. (Xing C., elated). Oh, how awfully good of you, dear Mrs. Juvenal ! You don't know how fond I am of dear little May—*(diffidently)*—But first of all, I feel it my duty to make a confession to you——

Mrs. J. (icily). A confession already ?

Chas. Yes. You wouldn't listen to me before, you know ! But anyway, I don't think you'll find it very unpleasant. To tell the truth, I'm not exactly—er—what you thought me to be.

Mrs. J. Indeed, sir !

Chas. (smiling). Fact, is, I'm not a drawing-master at all, nor do I take pupils.

Mrs. J. But my daughter !

Chas. She was the one exception. Directly I saw your advertisement in the paper I answered it, as I had previously known May by sight ; and being greatly struck with her appearance, I couldn't resist the opportunity of making her acquaintance.

May (exuberantly). Then it was a case of love at first sight, Charlie ?

Chas. I know now that it was, Maisie.

Mrs. J. But what are you, and how do you propose to support her ?

May. Ma, how can you enter into such sordid details at the present time ?

Chas. She's right, May ! I'm an artist by pro-

fession, Mrs. Juvenal, and make—well, more than a comfortable living by my pictures.

Mrs. J. (*starting, incredulously*). You never mean to tell me you're—Warren, *the* artist ?

Chas. Well—er—I—I—

May (*hugging him*). You are, Charlie ? Oh, you darling.

Mr. R. (*Xing C.*). Dear, dear ! This is quite a surprise. Allow me to congratulate you, my very dear sir—

Chas. (*grinning*). What, on my engagement, or because I happen—

Mr. R. (*hastily*). Oh, both, of course !

Chas. Thanks ! And am I to congratulate you, too, Mr. Rat—

Mr. R. You may, Mr. Warren. Mrs. Juvenal has graciously deigned to accept me ; and as May has given her consent ; that is—er—h'm ! (*turns off to L.C.*).

Chas. (*aside to May*). So that's how you managed it ?

Mr. R. (*continuing*). So I trust it will be but a short time before I lead her to the altar).

Chas. (*sighing, X.R.*). Well, you have the advantage of us there. I suppose May and I, will have to wait a year or two, till she's a little older.

May (*Xing C., gaily*). Oh, no ; we needn't ! Twenty is a very good age to get married at.

Mrs. J. (*screams, falls into chair L.C.*). May, you ungrateful, deceitful—

May. No need to worry, ma—nor you, to get alarmed, Mr. Ratcliff, at what I am about to say. The

truth is, there's been a little mistake in all our ages.

(*To Mr. R.*)—You thought mother was thirty-four, but she's really forty-three.

Mr. R. (amazed). Forty-three! Bless my soul, I should never have thought it!

Mrs. J. (pleadingly). Yes, it's true, Mr. Ratcliff, I can't deny it—(*sobs*).

May. But in her case, it was only a misunderstanding—(*severely*)—whereas in yours—

Mr. R. (perturbed). Yes, I know! I must confess that I've deceived you, dear Mrs. Juvenal—but only because I loved you. I'm really—er—(*coughs*)—fifty-two. Can you forgive me?

[*Enter Brid. L.C., with tray and tea. X.C. back.*]

Mrs. J. (rising). Yes—oh, yes—if you'll forgive me?

Mr. R. (embracing her). Lucretia—my own!

May. Charlie!

Brid. The tay, mum!

CURTAIN.

THE MATCHMAKERS

A Play in One Act.

CHARACTERS.

MISS MATCHAM.

ELSIE CARLTON. *Her Ward.*

JIM SHERSTON. *Her Nephew.*

MRS. PRESCOTT. *Her bosom friend.*

ANNIE. *Her maid (Or can be taken "off.")*

SCENE.

Miss Matcham's drawing room. Doors R.C. back and L. Bow window L.C. back, but cut off by curtains almost drawn together. Desk R. Table C., with easy chairs on either side of it. Settee L.C. Comfortably furnished.

Time. Afternoon.

At rise of Curtain, Miss Matcham is at table arranging some flowers in a vase.

Miss M. Oh, dear ! what a nuisance these young people are, to be sure !—they never will fall in with one's views—even if it's to their advantage to do so. Here have I set my heart on my nephew Jim marrying Elsie, my ward ; and the more I try to throw them together, the more they seem to avoid one another. It's most exasperating !—especially, as I'm sure they

like each other. What's to be done ? Oh, I know ! I'll write to my very dear friend Amelia ; ask her to tea ; and she, being a woman of brains, will be—
(crossing to desk).

Enter Mrs. Prescott, L., announced by Maid.

Annie. Mrs. Prescott, ma'am !

Miss M. (turning). What ! (*Comes C.*) Talk of the —(*kisses her*) Oh, I'm so glad you've come, dear ! I was just on the point of writing to you. I'm in a quandary, and thought that perhaps you might be able to help me. Take a seat.

Mrs. P. Why, whatever's the matter ? (*Sits L. of table.*) Anything wrong ?—cook given notice ?—or lost your fortune ?—

Miss M. No, no ! It's about Jim and Elsie—
(*Crosses L.*)

Mrs. P. Well, what of them ?—been doing something dreadful, I suppose !—eloped, or what ?

Miss M. (bitterly) Eloped ! No. I only wish they would—that's just it. (*Sits on settee L.*)

Mrs. P. Just what ? Please be a little more explicit, my dear, and don't lose your head. Surely, you're not anxious for them to run away ?

Miss M. No, of course not ?—that is, not exactly. But I want them to get engaged, and—oh, dear ! they won't. I've done everything I can to throw them together, but the more I try, the more indifferent they seem to be to each other. To each one, separately, I've imparted—in strict confidence, of course—that *he*, or *she*, will inherit all my money, if *he*, or *she*, will

marry according to my wishes—but all to no purpose. It's simply heart-rending !

Mrs. P. (pensively). Oh, so that's the trouble ! Well, it shouldn't be a very difficult thing to accomplish.

Miss M. (indignantly). Isn't it ? Just *you* try !

Mrs. P. (dryly). I presume that's what you want me to do.

Miss M. Oh, yes, dear—if only——

Mrs. P. You haven't intimated to either of them, I suppose, whom it is, you wish *he*, or *she*, to marry ?

Miss M. No ! But anyone but a blind booby——

Mrs. P. (reprovingly). Alliteration, my dear !—*(hopefully).* Then there's still a chance for you.

Miss M. (rising, impulsively). How ? In what way ? *(Crosses to her).* Oh, I knew you could help me ! And to show my gratitude, Amelia darling, on the day that they are married, you will be the recipient of a lovely diamond and sapphire bracelet. *(Crosses to R. of table, sits.)*

Mrs. P. H'm ! I'm not certain whether that wouldn't bring me within the meaning of the Act—the Secret Commission's Act, I mean—but, perhaps, it might be merely marriage brokerage. Anyway, I suppose I must risk it.

Miss M. Oh, no, dear ; it will be just a little present from me to you.

Mrs. P. Same thing, dear !—but no matter. I am willing to risk a £10 fine for the sake of——

Miss M. A £50 bracelet.

Mrs. P. (shocked). Maria, how can you be so indelicate ? I was going to say, for the sake of obliging you.

Miss M. Same thing, dear !—but no matter. Now, tell me what I am to do ?

Mrs. P. Nothing simpler !—just the opposite to what you have been doing. You must disapprove of their being so much together——

Miss M. But that will keep them more apart than ever !

Mrs. P. Not at all ! Human nature, like dreams, nearly always goes by contraries.

Miss M. But——

Mrs. P. It's your only hope—that is, of course, taking it for granted that they really like each other !

Miss M. Oh, they do ! I'm sure they do.

Mrs. P. Very well, then ! Play upon their feelings—create jealousy, if you can—and above all, keep them from one another as much as possible. (*Rises.*) Now, I must be off.

Miss M. (rising). Why, what's your hurry ?—You've only just come. Stay, and have a cup of tea—besides, I want fuller details as to——

Mrs. P. Sorry, dear, but I haven't time. I only dropped in, really, to say goodbye ; as I'm off to the sea-side to-morrow with my son George, for a month. Just made up my mind on the spur of the moment. Ta-ta !

Miss M. Very sudden, isn't it ?

Mrs. P. Yes, but I prefer doing things with sudden-

ness—it enhances the pleasure.

Miss M. I don't see it myself ! You've nothing to look forward to——

Mrs. P. And therefore nothing to worry about.

Miss M. (*moving to L. with Mrs. Prescott*). Well, I hope you will enjoy yourself, and come back looking all the better for the change.

Mrs. P. Thanks. And mind you write to let me know how the prescription works.

Miss M. Of course, I will !

Mrs. P. (*at door L.*) Then, goodbye.

Miss M. Oh, I'll see you out !

Mrs. P. Please don't trouble.

Miss M. No trouble, Amelia !—it's a pleasure.

Mrs. P. (*mock severity*). Maria, I'm surprised at you !

Miss M. No, no ! you misunderstood——

[*Exeunt L. whilst talking*].

[*Enter Elsie R.C., followed by Jim*].

Elsie (*very bored*). Oh, dear ! I wonder where Guardy is ? (*Throws herself into chair L. of table, takes up work-bag*).

Jim (*yawning, coming down R.C.*). Making herself scarce, as usual, I suppose.

Elsie. Yes ; she seems to have a mania for that sort of thing.

Jim. She does. Well, as you're going to be busy, I may as well go into the library and read. (*About to cross to L.*).

Elsie (*impatiently*). Why don't you go to your Club

instead—instead of loafing about the house the whole livelong day ?

Jim. And be upbraided by Aunt for leaving you and her to your own devices ?

Elsie (throwing down work). Oh, I don't mind !

Jim. But she does !

Elsie. I believe she does it on purpose, just to throw——!

Jim. Well ! Throw what ?

Elsie. Oh, nothing !

Jim (it dawning upon him). You don't mean to ay. (*Comes R. of table*). By Jove, I never thought of that. You mean, she's trying to throw us together ?

Elsie. Well, she seems to have succeeded in doing so, whether it was her intention or not.

Jim. Of course, it may have been pure accident.

Elsie (hastily). And in any case, the thing's absurd.

Jim (crossing to L. of her). Of course it is ! (*Laughing*). Just imagine you and— (*Breaks off stuttering*).

Elsie (coldly). Oh, pray don't apologise !

Jim. I—I didn't mean anything—except that, of course, you couldn't care for me——

Elsie. Of course not ! That is——

Jim. Pray don't apologise !

Elsie (impatiently). Oh, let's drop this silly conversation ! We seem to be taking it for granted that such was Guardy's intention, whereas nothing may have been further from her thoughts. In any case, we've always been chums, Jim ; so let's remain so——

and nothing more. (*Rises, turns off to R.*).

Jim. By Jove ! you're right, Elsie. I didn't give you credit for so much common sense.

Elsie (sarcastically). Thanks. If I had had any doubt about your feeling in the matter, your last observation would have effectually dispelled it.

Jim. And, of course, you don't care, or you wouldn't have said that the thing was absurd. All the same Aunt should be made to see the absurdity, whether intentional or the reverse, so as to stop her continuing it.

Elsie. Oh, it would be your place to do that. (*Sits R. of table.*)

Jim (sitting L. of table). Perhaps so ! but I think it would be more effectual if it came from you. Two women can always speak to one another on such matters better than a man and a woman. All you have to do——

Elsie (decidedly). I don't agree with you ! You're her nephew—a relative—whereas I'm only her ward—and no connection.

Jim (coaxingly). But a woman has so much more tact and delicacy than a mere man.

Elsie (sneeringly). And a mere man has always some flattering remarks to make to a woman, when he wishes her to do his dirty work for him.

Jim (huffily). Not at all ! It's the woman who always wants the man to do everything, while she sits quietly by, and lets him take all the brunt.

Elsie. That's right. Put all the blame on the

woman, as has been done from time immemorial.

Jim. I'm not ! I only——

Elsie (curtly). Well, I certainly don't intend to mention the subject ! (*Rises*).

Jim (warmly). And you may rest assured that I shan't. (*Rises, turns off to L.*)

Elsie (R.C.). Very well ! You needn't lose your temper over it.

Jim (L.C.). It's not I !—it's you. I was arguing the matter calmly and dispassionately, when you suddenly grew angry and began making disparaging remarks.

Elsie. I did no such thing. I was merely stating the plain facts of the case——

Jim. As you seem determined to be as disagreeable as possible, I may as well relieve you of my presence. (*Turns up R.C. back.*)

Elsie (turning up). Oh, I couldn't allow you to turn yourself out of the room on my account. After all, you are more entitled to it than I am—so I will go instead.

Jim (C. back). So that you can console yourself with the thought that I had forced you to leave ? No, thank you ! Besides, ladies are supposed to have certain privileges——

Elsie (R. of door R.C.). And gentlemen are supposed to have a certain amount of manners ; though it doesn't always seem to be the case.

Jim. Thanks ! That decides me ! I'm going ! (*Steps to door.*)

Elsie (stepping to door). So am I ! N.B.—See note.

NOTE.—If a R.C. back door is impracticable, as it would be when played in a drawing-room, door R. can be substituted, but in this case, Jim and Elsie towards the finish of their first quarrel move to door L., and Miss Matcham enters by it. A screen also can be substituted for the bow window.

Jim. I shall go first !

Elsie. And so shall I !

[Enter Miss M., R.C., stands aghast.]

Jim (sneering). Feminine logic !

Elsie (angrily). Masculine brutality !

Miss M. Good gracious ! What's the matter ?

[They both turn suddenly front, shamefacedly].

Miss M. What's the matter I say ?

Jim (sullenly). Nothing. *(Comes down R.C.)*

Miss M. Elsie, what is it ? *(Cross C.)*

Elsie (coming down L.C.). Nothing !

Miss M. You don't mean to say you two have been quarrelling ? *(Looks from one to the other.)*

Jim. No ! I certainly haven't.

Elsie. And I—no more than he.

Jim. It was only a slight argument.

Elsie. A mere difference of opinion !

Miss M. What about ?

Elsie. Oh !—only—of how to do a certain thing—
if some other thing of which we weren't at all certain
it was so, happened to be so.

Miss M. Delightfully lucid !—or is it an Alice-in-Wonderland conundrum ?

Elsie (*glancing at Jim*). Oh, no ; quite simple and logical—and all my own.

Miss M. I don't understand you. Jim, will you kindly explain ?

Jim. Certainly. We were merely arguing as to how to stop a certain thing if it was so or not.

Miss M. Oh, indeed ! I'm afraid you also will have to be a little more explicit before I can grasp your meaning.

Jim. Regret I can't say any more, Aunt—for Elsie's sake.

Elsie. And I wouldn't—for Jim's.

Miss M. A nice way to treat me ! Well, whatever it was about, you two have been quarrelling, in spite of your denial—and I won't have that sort of thing going on in my house. The fact is, I've allowed you to be too much together—and now I intend to stop it.

[*Elsie and Jim look at each other*].

Elsie (*chuckling, comes to L. of Miss M.*). Oh then, it's all right, Guardy.

Jim (*smirking*). And our little spat has been all for nothing !

Miss M. What do you mean ?

Jim. Only that—we thought you were trying to—to—

Elsie. Throw us together.

Jim. Yes—throw us together.

Miss M. (*assuming indignation*). Throw you to—

gether? What an idea! Well, you will soon see how entirely mistaken you were. Jim, take yourself off! (*Points door L.*)

Jim. Certainly, if you wish it—(*crosses L.C.*)—though I don't see the necessity now that we've made it up.

Miss M. Because, as I've already said, I won't have you hanging on to Elsie's skirts the whole day long. (*Sits L. of table.*)

Jim (resentfully). I don't hang on to Elsie's skirts. Before, you were always at me for going off on my own hook, and leaving you two alone. That's the only reason why I've given you so much of my company lately.

Elsie (sarcastically). How very condescending we are to be sure! (*Turns up R.C. back.*)

Miss M. (ironically). You don't say so!

Jim. Yes, I do! And now, for no apparent reason, you seem suddenly to have changed round—

Miss M. Not at all! Only I've been too lax. But your quarrelling has awakened me to a sense of my responsibilities, so will you please take your departure—for a few hours, at least.

Jim. Oh, all right! (*Turns off to L., moodily.*)

Miss M. Besides, I wish to have a private chat with Elsie about her future.

Elsie (surprised). My future! (*Comes down R. of table.*)

Miss M. Yes, it's about time you were thinking of getting married, and by good luck, I've just discovered

a most eligible young man.

Jim (at door L., turning, gruffly). Rot ! Elsie's much too young to get married.

Miss M. (severely). She's twenty-three ! And, anyway, I certainly don't consider you an authority on the subject.

Elsie (leaning over Miss M.). But who is it ?

Jim (resentfully). Some bounder, I suppose !

Miss M. (indignantly). Jim ! *(Rises).*

Jim (sulkily). I beg your pardon, Aunt.

Elsie. But, Guardy, I've no intention of entering into a *mariage de convenance*—not even to please you. I object to being made a chattel of—to be disposed of to the highest bidder. *(Comes down R.C.)*

Miss M. (brusquely). No one's trying to auction you off ; and you'll probably change your mind when you hear who it is. *(Turns up R.C. back).* I'll fetch Mrs. Prescott's letter, and read you what she says. *(Exits hastily R.C. back.)*

Jim (coming C. irately). So that's the meaning of her sudden change ! I see it all now.

Elsie (surprised). It's George Prescott then, I suppose !

Jim (savagely). That conceited young puppy !

Elsie (bridling). He's not. I think he's rather nice.

Jim. You always had queer tastes. *(To L.C.)*

Elsie. I must have had, as I used to regard you as a friend. *(C. turns up to R.C. back.)*

[Re-enter Miss M., R.C.]

Elsie. What ! back already, Guardy ? Well, what

does she say ?

Miss M. I haven't fetched the letter yet. I suddenly remembered that Jim was still hanging about the room, and—(to Jim) Why haven't you gone ? Take yourself off at once (coming down R.C.) It's a good thing I returned. Judging from the expression on your faces, you've begun quarrelling again.

Jim (angrily). All right ! I'll go for a good long walk, and shan't return to dinner. (Turns off to L.)

Miss M. Very well ! Elsie and I will then be able to talk over matters quietly (meaningly) I'll leave the door on the latch for you're sure to be late as they always have bridge or music till nearly midnight.

Jim (gruffly, surprised). They ? Who ?

Elsie (L. of Miss M.). Who do, Guardy ?

Miss M. The Bartons, of course ! (Nodding towards Jim). He always goes there when——

[Jim about to expostulate].

Oh, you needn't deny it. (To Elsie.) After all, Gladys Barton is a sweet little girl, and I believe, is more than half in love with Jim.

Elsie (scornfully) crosses C.). Gladys Barton !—that overdressed doll.

Jim. (coming L.C.). Mere spite ! I don't think she's at all a bad little sort.

Elsie. Oh, there's no accounting for taste.

Miss M. Elsie, be quiet ! I think that Gladys would be a splendid match for Jim ; she's——

Elsie. Yes, if he wishes to be nagged at all day long.

Jim. Anyway, she doesn't lose her temper and

make nasty remarks without the slightest provocation. Not that I had the faintest intention of going to the Barton's, but since Aunt has suggested it——

Elsie (sneering). I wish you a very pleasant evening. *(Throws herself into chair L. of table).*

Miss M. Elsie! Jim! Will you stop that wrangling? I don't know what's come over you lately. *(To Elsie.)* A nice frame of mind you'll be in to receive George Prescott when he arrives for tea——

Jim. Oh, so he's coming to tea?

Miss M. Jim, leave the house at once; and this time I'll see that you *do* go.

Jim (crosses to door L., surlily). Oh, I've no wish to stay—now. Good-bye!

[Exit L., bangs door].

Miss M; Thank goodness, he's gone at last! Now, Elsie, don't dare to move from that chair till I return with Mrs. Prescott's note. Keep quiet, and try to regain your composure. I know Jim's rather trying at times, but—*(Turns up to R.C. back.)*

Elsie. Oh, I'm perfectly calm! *(Tosses her head.)*

Miss M. Very well! I won't keep you a minute.

Exit R.C.

Elsie (rising). I suppose that Barton girl has been throwing herself at his head! *(Paces indignantly to and fro.)* Men are such fools—so easily captivated by a baby face! *(Creeps stealthily to door L.)* I wonder if he has really gone to—to see—that woman.

She turns the knob of door very gently and gradually opens it. Jim, from the outside does the same.

Both peep round till they see each other, with door half open.

Elsie (gladly surprised). Jim! then you haven't gone?

Jim (entering furtively). No; I didn't see why I should beturned out of the house just to—to —

Elsie. Just on my account? But aren't you going to the Bartons?

Jim (C., shamefacedly). I won't—if you would rather I didn't.

Elsie (tossing her head). Oh, I don't care!—it's immaterial to me.

Jim (angrily). I suppose it is, now that you're going to have that Prescott cub to tea with you.

Elsie (defiantly). Anyway, he's not a boor—and isn't rude.

Jim (crossing to door L.) Well, I wish you joy of him.

Elsie. The same to you—with *her*. It's queer what attraction dressmakers models have for most men, who are otherwise sane. (*Crosses C.*)

Jim (with his hand on knob). And it's queer how men with money attract all girls—sane or otherwise.

Elsie (angrily). Jim, if you dare to insinuate——

Jim. Oh, I'm insinuating nothing—only the Prescott youth will have plenty. (*Half opens door.*)

Elsie (furiously crosses L.) You — you — I'll never speak to you again. I hate you! (*Turns off to R., breaking into sobs.*) I — hate you. (*Sobs.*)

Jim. Well, you. . . . (*Relenting, remorsefully.*) Oh,

I'm sorry, Elsie ! I didn't mean to hurt your feelings—I was a brute. (*Crosses to her.*) I ought n't to have said that.

Elsie. Go away ! don't speak to me. (*Sinks into chair L. of table.*)

Jim. But really, Elsie, I didn't mean it. I don't know why, but it made me mad to think that you and young Prescott—

Elsie. I don't care a bit about him—and you know it. But you thought the money would make a difference to me. (*Sobs.*)

Jim. No, dear ! upon my word, I didn't really. (*Slips his arm round her neck, sits on arm of chair.*) Don't cry—only you made me feel so jealous.

Elsie (*surprised*). Jealous ! You ! But why should—

Jim. Because—I love you, darling—only I hadn't realized it till—till Aunt began her scheming to marry you off—

Elsie. But—but Guardy said you were in love with Gladys Barton !

Jim. No ; she hinted that Gladys was half in love with me—as, I suppose, she would like to see us make a match of it—but, of course, that's all nonsense.

Elsie (*drying her eyes.*) Then you don't care for her—a scrap !

Jim. Of course not ! I've never loved anyone but you dear. Elsie, will you marry me ?

Elsie. Oh Jim ! (*Raises her face to be kissed.*)

Jim (*jubilantly*). What, Elsie, you also care ?

Elsie. I believe I loved you all the time, though, like yourself, I didn't realize it till——

[*Miss M.'s voice heard outside ; they rise abruptly.*]

Miss M. (outside). Annie, we'll have tea directly, as——

Jim. Aunt !

Elsie. What shall we do ?

Jim. Break the news to her, and so knock all her confounded matchmaking schemes on the head.

Elsie. No, that would only put her back up. She must be won round gradually.

Jim. Well, she mustn't find us here. Let's go into the conservatory and talk the matter over.

Elsie. But she told me not to leave the room. And anyway, she would soon discover our retreat and separate us. (*Turning up.*) Oh, I know ! (*Points to bow window.*)—in there. We can draw the curtains close together, and it's the last place she would dream of looking for us. (*Slips into recess.*)

Jim (following her). Good idea ! (*Draws curtains to.*)

[*Enter Miss M., R.C.*]

Miss M. (speaking off). And you might make some buttered toast, Annie. (*Turning front.*) I'm afraid I've mislaid the letter, *Elsie*. . . why, where has she gone ! (*Crosses to door L., calling off.*) *Elsie ! Elsie !* (*Crossing to door R.C.*) What can have become of her ? (*Calls off door R.C.*) Annie, do you know where *Miss Elsie* is ?

Annie (outside). No, mum ; I haven't seen her.

Miss M. (significantly). Oh ! Did Mr. Jim go out ?

Annie (outside, ad lib.). Not within the last ten minutes, mum, or I should have heard 'im, as I was at work in the dining room.

Miss M. (closing door ; comes down). Curious !—very curious ! (*Elated.*) Perhaps they have (*Despondently.*) But no, that would be too good to be true, so soon.

[*Bell rings off ; crosses to door L.*]

Who's that, I wonder ? I didn't expect any visitors—(*Calls off door L.*) Annie, say I'm not——

Annie (outside, ad. lib.). Mrs. Prescott, ma'am.

[*Enters Mrs. P., L.*]

Mrs. P. (entering). Oh, yes, you are Maria—to me.

Mrs. M. (surprised). What ! Amelia !—you back ?

Mrs. P. For two very good reasons. The first was, that I couldn't rest till I had heard how the prescription was working. I knew that you, in your usual impetuous way, would start operations at once ; so I decided to drop in——

[*Mrs. M. grimaces.*]

What's the matter ? You don't mean to say it's been a failure ? (*Sits L. of table.*)

Mrs. M. (feebly). No—that is, I don't know.

Mrs. P. Don't know !

Miss M. The fact is, they have disappeared.

Mrs. P. Disappeared !

Mrs. M. After quarrelling violently.

Mrs. P. Quarrelling !

Miss M. (irritably). For goodness sake, don't sit

there like a parrot, repeating every word I say, Amelia. Tell me what I am to do ?

Mrs. P. Don't yet excited, Maria ! it's a most promising sign.

Miss M. But where could they have vanished to ?

Mrs. P. Have you searched the house ?

Miss M. No ; but I've bellowed for them till I'm hoarse.

Mrs. P. I suspect they have already begun spooning in some quiet corner—but that must be stopped, if——

Miss M. I know ! (*Crossing to door R.C.*). I'll send Annie to look for them. (*Calls off.*) Annie !

Annie (outside). Yes, mum.

Miss M. See if Mr. Jim or Miss Elsie are at home—look everywhere.

Annie (outside). Very good mum !

Mrs. P. Now don't worry any more about it at present, Maria. I expect before many weeks are past, I shall be wearing that lovely £50 diamond and sapphire bracelet you promised me.

[*Jim, then Elsie, peep through curtains.*]

Miss M. But I know they haven't left the house, so——

Mrs. P. (curtly). We can drop the subject till we hear Annie's report. And now for the second reason that I came—I've a splendid piece of news to——

Miss M. (absently). Indeed ! Changed your mind about going to the sea-side ?

Mrs. P. Well, yes, that's all been knocked on the head because my son George—— !

Miss M. (absently). Yes, your son George—— ?

Mrs. P. (proudly). Has just announced to me his engagement to Gladys Barton.

Miss M. rises suddenly from settee on which she has been sitting].

Miss M. What ! (*Laughing nervously.*) It's a good thing Elsie and Jim aren't here to have heard your good news. I've been using your son George's and Gladys Barton's names in my endeavour to—follow your instructions.

[*Jim and Elsie emerge from behind curtains.*

(*Or, if a screen is used, it should be knocked down.*)

Jim (coldly). But we are here, Aunt !

Elsie (coming down L.C.). Guardy, what mischief—

Miss M. Good gracious ! (*Runs to door R.*). Amelia you explain ! I—I don't feel well.

[*Exit R.*].

Mrs. P. (aside). Coward ! (*Rising, aloud, genially.*) How do you do, Jim ? *Elsie, you naughty girl——*

Jim (haughtily, down C.) Mrs. Prescott, we would like to hear what you have to say, concerning your part in this dastardly plot——

Elsie (L. of Jim). And also concerning the lovely £50 diamond and sapphire bracelet you were to receive——

Mrs. P. (cross C. between them). Don't be so melodramatic, my dear ! Heroics are out of fashion in these present matter-of-fact days.

Jim. It's no use your trying to shuffle out of it. We overheard every word you said, so——

Mrs. P. (smiling). Well, I wouldn't own up to it, if I were you—it's not considered to be quite the thing—to eavesdrop.

Elsie (L.C.). We weren't eavesdropping!—we couldn't help hearing, as——

Mrs. P. There was nothing to prevent you from disclosing yourselves directly we came into the room!—in fact, it would have been mere politeness to have done so. But I suppose you were so busy flirting in that recess——

Elsie (indignantly). Flirting indeed!

Mrs. P. Well, why were you hidden together behind those curtains? It isn't at all a nice thing——

Jim. All this is beside the question, *Mrs. Prescott.* (*Coming C.*) As I said before, you and Aunt contrived some vile plot against us——

Mrs. P. (crossing R.C.). Not against you—but in your interest.

Jim. Well, you and she may imagine it's to our interest to keep us apart—(*slipping his arm round Elsie's waist*)—but Elsie and I——

Mrs. P. (slightly surprised). Apart? But— (*Breaks off chuckling.*)

Elsie. It's no good your denying it. We heard you say so.

Jim. Yes—your very words were: “I expect they are spooning in some quiet corner, and that must be stopped.”

Elsie. You also said it was a healthy sign that we had quarrelled.

Mrs. P. (smiling). Oh, you sweet innocents !

Elsie. And, I suppose, that after we had been effectually parted, you were to receive as a reward from Guardy your trumpery diamond bracelet.

Mrs. P. (smiling). On no ; in that case I should never have got it.

Jim. What do you mean ?

Mrs. P. Your Aunt promised it to me on the day you were married.

Jim. Married !

Elsie. What !

Mrs. P. Yes—I mean it. And you are engaged now, aren't you ?

Jim. Yes. But——

Mrs. P. (sitting L. of table). Then it's all right—let me explain. It was your Aunt's dearest wish that you two should make a match of it.

Jim (L. of her—Elsie R. of her). Then why couldn't she have said so straight out ?

Mrs. P. If she had, it would never have taken place. You would never have realized that you were fond of one another if you hadn't been threatened with separation and a touch of jealousy thrown in.

Elsie (smiling). And you showed Guardy how to bring it about ? I see now.

Jim (with mock indignation but breaking into a grin). We've been nicely done !

Elsie (crossing to him). No—we've been done—nicely.

Mrs. P. (rising, elated, crosses to door R., calling).

Maria ! it's all right—you can come in. I know you're behind that door trying to catch all that is being said—but you could not have heard very much, or——

[Enter Miss M., hurriedly].

Miss M. (*crossing C.*). Oh Elsie, dear, I'm so glad ! (*Embracing her*). Jim, you've made me so happy. (*Kisses him*). Amelia, I always said you were a woman of brains. Your bracelet shall be——

Jim. A hundred guinea one, eh, Elsie ?

Elsie. Yes, rather—as a wedding present from us.

Mrs. P. Oh, then, that relieves me from any fear of being brought within the meaning of the Act.

CURTAIN.

18/1/21

AN ARTFUL OLD CARD.

A Comedy in One Act.

CHARACTERS:

MISS CAROLINE ORKNEY.

MISS CLARISSA ORKNEY.

MOIRA STANLEY (*their adopted child*).

ADRIAN ORKNEY (*their nephew*).

SCENE:

*Miss Orkney's sitting-room. Time—after breakfast.
Table R.C., chairs each side. Settee (with high back)
L.C., Chair C. back, Doors R & L., Fireplace C. back.*

*At rise of curtain Miss Car. seated L. of table, knitting. Miss Clar.,
perturbed, seated on settee*

Car. There's no doubt about it, Clarissa, by hook
or by crook we must get him married to Moira, by fair
means or by foul. It will be the only means of saving
him.

Clar. (dubiously). Perhaps! But all the same, I
don't see how it's to be managed. You can't force him
to it against his will.

Car. No! But if a little diplomacy were used, it
might be accomplished.

Clar. (timorously). But, Caroline, is it wise to interfere in these matters? Why not trust to time to bring it about?—if you really consider it's for the best.

Car. (scornfully). Time, indeed! Haven't they been living with us now for more than six months, and Adrian seems no nearer proposing to her than when they first met—treats her in fact as a chum, a sister—though I'm afraid our little protégée has lost her heart to the handsome young scamp.

Clar. Then if he doesn't care for her, why try to force it on him?

Car. Because, if my surmise is correct, it's only because his eyes have not yet been opened to her charms and good qualities. But once get them to the kissing stage, and the rest will be easy.

Clar. But he has fallen from grace since we saw him last—before he came into this money—so in my opinion it would be better to let the matter drop.

Car. (decisively). And it's for that very reason that I consider it should be proceeded with. Our nephew has got himself mixed up with a fast set, who flatter him only for what they can get out of him, and who will eventually ruin him unless we step in and forestall them.

Clar. (dismally). Yes, he has changed! He vaunts himself and is puffed up with pride—(*rises, X., R.C. ; sits R. of table*). And, Caroline, on one occasion—though I didn't say anything about it at the time—I'm almost sure he had had *one* glass of champagne too many.

Car. (dryly). And on one occasion, my dear Clarissa—and that not so very long ago—I noticed that he had had, two, three, or perhaps *four* glasses of something too much.

Clar. (horrificed). Do you mean to say he came home in a state of inebriation ?

Car. Well, what he would term, being merry ; and I could also see that he was rather fuddled.

Clar. (shocked). Oh, horrible ! To think he should look so upon the wine when it is red.

Car. Nonsense ! Don't make him out worse than he really is. There's a lot of good in the boy, and I'm fond of him ; but he's just at that stage of his existence when he requires a firm hand over him—and the most restraining influence would be that of a wife.

Clar. (pessimistically). If he hasn't already sunk too low !

Car. (sharply). Of course he hasn't ! So, it's my intention to put into operation, as soon as possible, an idea which occurred to me, and which, I fancy, will bring them together quicker than anything else.

Clar. (inquisitively). Oh ! What is it ?

Car. (dryly). I'd better not say, or your sensitive conscience would be sure to raise all manner of objections to the plan ; and it might cause you some uneasiness—even if you didn't try to thwart it.

Clar. (leaning towards her). Then it must be something underhand. Be careful, Caroline, or you may be getting us both into hot water.

Car. Oh, I'm not afraid ! I'm a pretty tough old

customer, and I won't mind if there's a bit of trouble if we can only save him from his friends.

[Enter Moira, L.]

Moira (merrily). Hullo, Aunties, what are you discussing so seriously? (*L.C.*). You look like too old conspirators concocting some deadly plot.

Car. Merely talking about—er—your welfare, child!

Moira (puzzled). But I'm all right, Aunt Caroline. No one could have two kinder old aunties. Indeed, I think you're both doing your utmost to spoil me—you give me everything I want, and I'm perfectly happy.

Car. (pointedly). Perfectly, Moira?

Moira (hesitating). Why—er—yes.

Car. Then I'm so glad for both your sakes. (*Clar. looks surprised*).

Moira (blankly). Both our sakes? What do you mean?

Car. Well, I wasn't quite sure of *your* feelings towards him!

Moira (X back of table, amazed). I don't understand, Aunt! Towards whom?

Car. (assuming surprise). Adrian, of course! Surely you realised the importance of what occurred last night?

(*Clar. starts. Car waves her down*).

Moira. But nothing extraordinary happened that I know of! Adrian certainly appeared to be in

higher spirits than usual, but beyond that he——

Car. Of course he was trying to assume a light and airy manner—my shrewd old eyes told me so at once—but underneath it all he was in grim earnest. You remember how he slipped his arms around your waist just as you were off to bed.

Clar. (in consternation). What's that you're saying, Caroline? Adrian had the impudence to——

Car. (coldly). Pray control yourself, Clarissa! There was nothing wrong in it as you would have seen for yourself, had you been in the room at the time. When a young man is very much in love with a young woman he sometimes forgets the strict conventionalities and——

Clar. But, Caroline, what do you mean? You never mentioned anything of this to me just now; in fact——

Car. I saw no occasion to. Now please keep quiet!

Moirá (coming L. of Car., sits on stool at her feet). But, Auntie, are you suggesting that Adrian is in love with me?

Car. Certainly, child! You must be blind if you haven't seen it for yourself. In fact, he as much as told you so.

Moirá (amazed). Told me! Why, he has never said a word that could have led me to suppose he——er——cared for me.

Car. Ah, you don't know young men, my dear! Now-a-days a proposal is seldom made in so many words. Young people fall into an engagement without

the actual question being asked ; or a hint may be dropped, and the ardent lover under an assumed indifference breathlessly waits to see how it has been received. *That's* what happened last night.

Moir. But I didn't notice anything from his manner——

Car. And therefore you didn't reciprocate ! Now, I understand ! So that's why the poor fellow didn't know how to take you. He must either have felt repulsed by your attitude, or else he considered you required a little time to think the matter over—the latter most probably—and that must be the reason he didn't put in an appearance at breakfast this morning. (*Bus. Clar. & Car.*).

Moir. But, Auntie, I'm sure you must be mistaken. I allow he placed his arm around me, but only in a playful sort of way.

Car. And whilst doing so, didn't he remark that he hoped you and he would always be happy together ?

Moir. Yes ; but I took it in purely a general sense.

Car. It was his manner of saying it that misled you. There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that he intended to convey a hint of his feelings towards you.

Moir (wistfully). I wish I could think so, Aunt, for I—I do love him, and to marry him would complete my happiness. But I——

Car. Wait till he appears, and you'll soon find that what I've said is correct.

Clar. (aghast). But Caroline——

Car. (sternly). What do you know about these things, Clarissa? You've had no experience.

Clar. (deprecatingly). A little, Caroline—a little—not very much I admit, but still some—(sighs). Only it pleased Heaven that I should remain a spinster.

Car. (grimly). And it pleased me, myself, to remain one — (viciously) — the worthless scamp. (*Ordinary voice*)—But Adrian is of different stuff, there's the making in him of a fine man.

Moira (radiantly). Then you really and truly think he cares for me, Auntie? And that it's only because he's shy he——

Car. Sure of it, my dear! And so may you be. Now you'd better run along and attend to your household duties, there are a lot of things to be done.

Moira (gaily). All right, Auntie (*X.L.*).

Car. And when you meet Adrian don't be bashful or stand-offish; but let him see you understand and appreciate his wordless offer.

Moira. Oh, I will.

Car. Also, it would be advisable not to allude in any way to last night, unless he should first speak of it.

Moira. Very well; I'll remember! Oh, you've made me feel so happy. Ta-ta! [*Exit*].

Clar. (amazed). But, Caroline, is it really true that——

Car. (rising). What a question! Of course it isn't. He neither proposed, nor had the least intention of doing so (*X.C., chuckles*). Nevertheless, I'm going to make him believe he did.

Clar. Then all the time you've been practicing

deceit upon the child ; and now intend to do the same by him ?

Car. (annoyed). You're too crude, Clarissa. I call it diplomacy.

Clar. Only another name for it. And I can't at all approve of such a proceeding. Besides, I don't think you'll find it quite such an easy task to hoodwink Adrian as you did the girl ; and then you'll have raised her hopes, only to dash them to the ground again.

Car. On the contrary, *he'll* be the most easily gulled as it was *last* night that he came home after he had been looking upon the wine when it was red—or green, yellow, or white for all I know. And although he wasn't actually drunk at the time he was fuddled enough to have no very clear recollection of all he did.

Clar. In that case you've no right to sacrifice a sweet young girl like Moira on the altar to Moloch.

Car (C.). Bosh ! I tell you it will be the very best thing for them both. It isn't as if he were addicted to loose living, but young men will make merry at times ; and he had been to what he calls a stag-party, so don't talk nonsense.

Clar. (dubiously). Oh ! Still my mind misgives me. Supposing that——

Car. Your conscience was always too tender, Clarissa, and anyway, having once set my hand to the plough—in your manner of speaking—I've no intention of turning back.

Clar. (dismally). Doing evil that good may come of

it. It's the Jesuit Creed, Caroline, and I don't hold with it. Mark my words, it will only bring us into trouble.

Car. (scornfully). You needn't be alarmed. I'll take all the blame.

Clar. And supposing Moira discovers the trick, she will turn against us ; then we shall be left desolate and oppressed.

Car. But she won't. They will both be too well primed to indulge in any retrospective confidences. Now you had better run along too, and help the girl, as Adrian will be down presently. I heard him ringing for his shaving-water half-an-hour ago.

Clar. (rising). Very well ; I'll go—(*dolefully*)—but I misdoubt me, and the way of the transgressor is hard (*X.L.*).

Car. (R.C.). You needn't worry. I've full faith in my powers —(*emphatically*)—only keep a silent tongue in your head !

Clar. (mournfully). All right ; but mark *me*, evil will come of it. [*Exit L.*].

Car. (grimly, sitting L. of table). Well, if good comes out of evil afterwards—in other words, if I can get them married—I shall be quite content.

[*Enter Adrian, R.*].

Ad. (shamefacedly). Oh—er—good morning, Aunt Caroline ! Sorry I wasn't down to breakfast, but——

Car. (knitting, grimly). But you weren't feeling very well, eh ?—what you would call a little cheap. I don't

wonder—after last night !

Ad. (sitting R. of table). I'm awfully sorry, Aunt, but—er—we gave a small send off to one of our pals who's going to be married next week—er——

Car. (severely). And you consider that sufficient excuse for coming home beastly drunk !

Ad. Oh, I say, not as bad as that ! I allow we made rather merry, but—er—I was perfectly clear-headed.

Car. Humph ! I'm glad to hear it. I was afraid you had no very distinct recollection of your actions after you arrived home.

Ad. Of course I had ! When I came in you and Moira were in the room, and afterwards she and I had a little fun together.

Car. (sharply). Fun ! Do you mean then to say you weren't in earnest ?

Ad. (surprised). Earnest about what ?

Car. Your proposal; of course !

Ad. Proposal ! I don't understand !

Car. You don't. And yet you say you remember all that happened ?

Ad. Yes ; but I'm sure I didn't make any sort of proposal. What was it about ?

Car. Marriage, of course !

Ad. (amazed). Really ! To whom ?

Car. Who else but Moira !

Ad. Moira ! But I never said a word that could have led her to suppose——

Car. It's quite evident, after all, that you weren't

so clear-headed as you tried to make out. Anyway, the poor child took it as such, and this morning is as happy as a lark.

Ad. (astounded). But it's impossible ! Moira's a jolly good little sort, and all that, but I've never thought of her in the light of a wife ; also, I've no intention of getting married for ages to come.

Car. Indeed ! Then I'm afraid you'll have to alter your decision. Not that I can see what she sees in you, but as she really and truly loves you, I've no intention of standing in the light of her happiness.

Ad. (rising). But there must be some mistake——

Car. There was ! The mistake was that you came home in a state of intoxication, and whilst in that condition you put your arms round her waist and gave her to understand that you were in love with her. So, having committed yourself, the only thing you can do is to abide by it, unless you intend to act the part of a cad, and get shunned by all decent people.

Ad. (perturbed). Of course, if I've done what you say I'll have to go through with it, but I shall first have a little talk with Moira, and——

Car. (sharply). What ! And break the child's heart by explaining that you weren't altogether responsible for your actions ?

Ad. Then she didn't understand that I—I——

Car. She attributed your manner solely to high spirits.

Ad. Oh ! Then perhaps it would be better to say nothing.

Car. Quite so ! I'm glad you can see reason.

Besides, what objection can you have to her? She would make you an excellent wife, and if you eschew your fast friends and devote yourself to her, you'll soon discover what a treasure you've got.

Ad. Oh, I know she's one of the best; and if I'd ever thought of marrying, I might have——

Car. Well, you'll have to think of it now, so you may as well make up your mind to it. And if I were you, when you see her, allude as little as possible to what occurred last night for fear she should——

Ad. Oh, you needn't be afraid. I shan't mention it at all. All the same, I shall feel deuced awkward in her presence when I——

Car. She'll soon put you at your ease; and she'll understand any little diffidence on your part. Only endeavour to reciprocate her affection, even if you don't feel it at the moment—though you soon will, I'll warrant.

Ad. (*nervously*). All right, Aunt, I'll—I'll—do my best (*X.C.*).

Car. And the sooner you get the engagement ring, the better—(*rises*).

Ad. Oh—er—yes—of course!

[*Enter Moira L.*]

Moira (*entering*). Oh, Auntie—(*sees Ad., rushes forward, then stops*)—Oh, good morning, Adrian!

Ad. (*starts, then X. quickly to her*). Good morning, Moira—(*afterthought*)—dear (*kisses her lightly on forehead*).

Car. (X.R.). Perhaps I'm *de trop* seeing you're only just engaged, so I'll make myself scarce.

Moira (dismayed). Oh, no, Auntie—I——

Car. (ignoring her). And mind you don't keep her too long, Adrian. Your love-making mustn't cause her to neglect her household duties. [*Exit R.*]

[*Slight pause while they eye one another.*]

Moira (softly). Oh, Adrian, is it really true? You do really care for me?

Adrian. Yes, of course, Moira! You gathered that from last night?

Moira (dubiously). Y—Yes. But—(*holding up her face*)—aren't you going to kiss me?

Adrian (kissing her abruptly). Oh, sorry, dear! I'm afraid I was thinking of something else.

Moira (pouting). You're not very complimentary. Perhaps you've reconsidered the matter, and now don't want me? (*X.L. to settlee.*)

Adrian (following her). Oh, no! I want you as much as ever I did. But you see, it's all so new to me. I've never been engaged before—and—

Moira. I should hope not!

Adrian (continuing). So naturally one feels a little diffident at first.

Moira (surprised). But surely you needn't feel that way with me, Adrian?

Adrian (hastily). Oh, no! I mean I shan't in future, dear! But—(*seizing her by her shoulders,*

searchingly)—you do really love me, Moira—no humbug ?

Moira (amazed). Why, of course, dearest, or I would never have allowed you to kiss me—(*sits on settee*)—but you—you don't act as if you cared very much.

Adrian (sitting beside her). Oh, I do—I assure you I do—(*tenderly*)—and we're going to be very happy together, darling, aren't we ?

Moira (radiantly). Oh, Adrian, those were the very words you used last night.

Adrian. Did I ?

Moira. Surely you haven't forgotten ?

Adrian. N—No ! Only I was so elated at the time that I didn't pay much attention to the actual words used.

Moira. Well, you've made me very happy ; and I am sure Aunt Caroline is delighted.

Adrian. Aunt Clarissa, also, of course ?

Moira. Oh, what she really thinks I don't know.

Adrian. Why, did she say anything ?

Moira. Oh, no ; but she seems moody and dejected, and didn't even congratulate me.

Adrian. She's probably put out at the prospect of losing you, dear. She's awfully fond of you—(*slips his arm round her waist*).

Moira. Oh, I don't think that that had anything to do with it. It seemed to me as if something were worrying her—some secret trouble——

Adrian. Well, never mind her now ! I expect Aunt

Caroline will be calling you presently, so let's make the most of our time—(*gazing at her ardently*)—I never realised before how fond I was of you—(*kisses her*).

Moira (*archly*). Before last night, you mean !

Adrian. Oh, yes ! And every second I look at you now you grow more precious in my eyes—(*clasps her to him*).

Moira. Oh, Adrian !—(*embrace*).

[*Enter Clar. L., very woe-begone and sniffing*].

Clar. Oh, dear, oh dear ! What can I do ? But I won't be a party to it. It's sinful !—(*drops into chair C. back. Ad. and Moira jump up hastily*)—I won't !

Moira (*rushing to her*). Why, whatever's the matter, Auntie ?

Clar. (*starting*). Oh, I didn't know you were in the room, child !—(*to herself*)—but it's wicked—positively wicked—and the evil-doer shall be brought into condemnation.

Moira. Auntie, what—

Clar. Oh, I can't let you sacrifice yourself, my dear ; in spite of my promise to Caroline.

Moira. What do you mean, Auntie ? What promise did you make ?

Clar. It's all Caroline's fault. I told her I didn't approve of such proceedings ; still, she would go on with it.

Moira. With what ?

Clar. Your engagement to Adrian. The truth is, he never proposed to you at all, and——

*Moir*a (smiling). Oh, not in actual words, I know—but——

Clar. Nor in any other way. She only cheated you into the belief that he did.

Adrian (L. of her, *Moir*a R.). What do you mean ? I——

*Moir*a. But I don't understand, Auntie ! Aunt Caroline assured me——

Clar. She was deceiving you, so as to force you and Adrian into making a match of it.

Adrian (aside). Great Scott !

*Moir*a. But why resort to such measures when she knew that Adrian loved me ?

Clar. (tearfully). That's just it, *Moir*a. He didn't—he doesn't——

*Moir*a (to *Adrian*). You don't ?

Adrian (earnestly). Yes, I do, darling, only——

Clar. I say he didn't ! He never even thought about it until Caroline put it into his head.

*Moir*a (indignantly). Then all your protestations were a sham—a lie ?

Adrian. But, *Moir*a, it wasn't my fault ! Aunt Caroline gave me to understand that you had mistaken my action of last night as a proposal of marriage, so naturally I had to go on with it. Beside——

*Moir*a. How absurd ! You must have known perfectly well what you were doing, so how could she have led you to suppose——

Clar. But he didn't ! He——

*Moir*a. Didn't ! How do you mean ?

Clar. He came home in a state of inebriation, which you mistook for high spirits——

Moirá (horried). Do you mean he was drunk ?

Clar. Well, he wasn't altogether sober. So, fond as I am of our nephew, I couldn't let you give yourself to him without letting you know the hideous truth (*rises, X. to settee, sits*).

Moirá. Thanks, Aunt, for telling me. (*To Adrian*). And you thought it right to continue this deception, knowing all the while you didn't care two straws about me ? (*Comes down C.*).

Adrian. Aunt Caroline declared it was a point of honour. Besides which——

Moirá. Honour ! Did you imagine I would marry any man who didn't love me ? And how do you think I would have felt—after we'd been married—when I had discovered the truth ? Honour indeed ! (*X., R.C.*).

Adrian. But *Moirá*——

Moirá (voice breaking). And you to tell me such lies, pretending that you—you—cared, when——

Adrian (C.). No, *Moirá* ; it wasn't all pretence—I give you my word. Only for the first few seconds perhaps. Then I looked at you as a man looks upon a woman and I realised that I loved you—had loved you all along.

Moirá. It's false ! You only did it to please Aunt Caroline ; and—(*sobbing*)—you've broken my heart between you—(*falls into chair L. of table*).

Adrian. *Moirá*, I——

[Enter Car. R.].

Car. (*chuckling, grimly*). So you've already discovered the truth, I see.

Moir. (*rising furiously*). You wicked old woman ! What do you mean by——

Car. (*R.C.*). Tut-tut, child ! I deceived you on purpose—all of you, in fact—to gain my own ends, and your happiness !

Moir. Happiness ! My hatred, you mean ! I'll not stay another minute in the house ! I'll go and earn my own living, sooner than be beholden to you for another mouthful.

Car. (*sharply*). Nonsense, Moira ! Learn to control yourself !

Moir. I'm going to pack my trunk at once ; and I never wish to see you or Adrian again—(*turns to L.*).

Clar. (*to herself, sobbing*). There, I knew it !

Adrian (*coming down C., intercepting her*). But, Moira, you can't go like this——

Moir. (*fiercely*). I tell you, I shall. Stand out of my way.

Adrian (*decisively*). Not till you've promised to be my wife.

Moir. Marry you ? Never ! Let me pass !

Adrian. I won't, till you've heard me out. I——

Moir. Have you forgotten how to behave as a gentleman, as well as——

Adrian. No ; but you must hear me first—it's my right. I allow that when Aunt Caroline first made me believe I had proposed to you, I hadn't then thought

of you as a wife ; but the few minutes we had together as being engaged opened my eyes, and I do really love you with my whole heart—(*stands aside*).

Car. (pleased). Bravo, Adrian ! Just what I expected from you. Though if you had shewn the least hesitation, I should at once have owned up to my share in the affair, and then have sent you about your business. But I'm glad to find I was right.

Moir. Right or wrong, I don't intend to remain another minute here—(X. L.).

Clar. (rising). Oh, think again, Moira, if only for my sake—I——

Car. (X.C.) Don't be a fool, Moira ! And, Clarissa, stop that snivelling at once. I had no more intention of sacrificing our adopted niece than you had. I told you especially to keep a silent tongue in your head, as then I knew your tender conscience would force you to speak. So I was right, there, also. Now Moira, drop these heroics, and——

Moir. It's all very well to talk, but I won't marry a man who doesn't love me.

Adrian. (R.C.). But I do, Moira. I swear I do.

Car. Of course he does ; only he hadn't realised it till I opened his eyes.

Moir. (wavering). I don't believe it. He only says so to please you. It's impossible that he should fall in love with me in the few seconds we had together.

Adrian. There, you're wrong, dear—(*comes close to her*)—it was just those few seconds which enlightened me, and——

Car. Quite so, and as you told me you loved him, child——

Moir. Yes ; but my love has now turned to hate !

Car. Bosh ! Love—real love— isn't so easily——

Clar. (snivelling). Oh, I don't know——

Car. What do you know about it, Clarissa ; you've had no experience !

Clar. A little, Caroline—not very much, I admit, but still some.

Car. None at all ! Now, Moira, what's your answer ?

Adrian. Moira, let me prove my love for you. I'll do anything you say, only let me have a chance.

Moir. Then if you're really in earnest, ask me again in three months' time.

Car. (cynically). You'll be married by then, unless I'm much mistaken.

CURTAIN.

'CHAWLIE' SIKES

A Light Comedy in One Act

CHARACTERS :

MRS. LOQUETOR.
GERALDINE (*her daughter*).
GLADYS (" ")
HUNTER (*lady's-maid*)
CHARLES SIKES (*footman*).

SCENE :

Mrs. Loquetor's drawing-room. Doors R. and L. Settee L.C. Arm-chair C. Table and chairs R.C. Well furnished.
At rise of curtain Mrs. L., L.C., calls towards door L., which is open.

Mrs. L. Hunter, hurry up with my coat or I'll be late, and Madame Cécile isn't the sort of person that likes being kept waiting. It's already five minutes to four, and as my appointment's for four o'clock——

[Enter Hunter, L with cloak].

Hunt. Here it is, m'em ! (*helps her on with it*).

Mrs. L. Thanks ! And did you put the thick rug in the carriage ?

Hunt. I was just going to do it now !

Mrs. L. Oh, all right ! By the way, have the young ladies come home yet ?

Hunt. No, m'em ; I don't think so.

Mrs. L. (impatiently). What a nuisance those girls

are, to be sure! Well, when Mr. Frampton-Sykes arrives—which may be at any moment now—show him in here, and tell him I'm very sorry I had to go out, but that I really couldn't help it. One's a perfect slave to one's dressmaker in these days! And I also have to call at the registry office about that new footman, so I may possibly be a little late for tea. They promised to send some up on approval over a week ago, but up to the present not a single man has put in an appearance.

Hunt. Very well, m'em!

Mrs. L. Now run and fetch the rug, and tell the coachman I'm just coming.

Hunt. Yes, m'em! (*X.L.*)

[*Enter Glad. and Ger. L. Exit Hunt. L.*]

Mrs. L. (L.C.). Oh, so you've returned at last! I'd made sure you were going to be late as usual—and a nice state of affairs it would have been if your Cousin Charles had arrived here, on this, his first visit to us since he was a small boy—and no one at home to receive or welcome him. He'd have thought it very queer to say the least of it.

Glad. (X. R.C. with Ger.). Of course we had every intention of being back in time, mother. But his train isn't due till four o'clock, and—

Mrs. L. Well, it's that now! And anyway, it's absurd to leave things till the very last minute. Now mind, while he's here that you're to be as agreeable to him as possible. (*To Ger.*) It's about time you were getting settled, Geraldine—and I don't think your cousin would be at all a bad match for you. From all

I've heard, he's a most eligible and presentable young man—though I haven't seen him myself since he was a youngster.

Ger. (seated L. of table R.). Isn't it rather early in the day, mother, to discuss the subject considering that we, also, haven't seen him since we were children—and at that time I remember his sole amusement was to annoy people by playing silly practical jokes.

Mrs. L. Mere boyish pranks, which he must have outgrown long ago. So, take my advice and make hay while the sun shines. And if you can only catch his fancy, I shall then have the comforting reflection that I've done my duty—and got you both happily married.

Glad (seated C.). Are we both to marry him, then ?

Mrs. L. Don't be ridiculous, Gladys ! You know you're more than half engaged to Paul Reardon. So if Geraldine can manage Charles——

Glad. I've told you, mother, that I'm *not* going to marry Paul—nor am I in any way engaged to him. He's very nice and all that, but I don't care for him sufficiently to become his wife.

Mrs. L. (annoyed). Why not, pray ? He's a splendid match ! And after all the encouragement you gave him you can't very well back out of it now.

Glad. (sullenly). I didn't give him any encouragement—at least, not much—and——

Mrs. L. Quite enough to cause him to come and talk the matter over with me.

Glad. (indignantly). With you ? When ? Why ?

Mrs. L. About a week ago. The poor fellow thought you were cooling off, so he came and poured his grievances into my ear—said he was afraid to speak to you for fear of a refusal—and asked my advice. So I assured him that it was only a passing whim, and gave him my consent and yours.

Glad. (rising). You gave him my consent! But you had no business to—it's simply outrageous! And I was the person he should have come to—not you. (*X. L.C.*).

Mrs. L. (coolly). Not at all! I think he acted quite correctly. So you'd better make up your mind to accept him when he asks you—and not have any more bother about it.

Glad. (angrily). Thanks for letting me know. I shall certainly refuse him.

Mrs. L. (angrily). If you do, you'll earn for yourself the reputation of being a jilt, all over the country; and I don't intend to tolerate such a thing in my family.

[*Re-enter Hunt, L.*]

Hunt. Please, m'em, it's past the time for your appointment, and—

Mrs. L. (C. turning). Heavens! I'd forgotten all about it. All the fault of you two girls with your tantrums and obstinate ways, keeping me here talking. (*X L.C.*) Now you'd better mind what I've said, Gladys—while for you, Geraldine, you'd be well advised to do what I've suggested—so think it over carefully. (*Exit L.*)

Ger. (rising annoyed). I wish to goodness mother

would cease her silly matchmaking schemes on our behalf; it's becoming more unbearable every day. (*X L.C.*) When I do marry, it shall be to the man of my choice—not her's.

Glad. (R.C.) It's all very well to talk, but you know what she is, and you'd probably find it much more difficult than you imagine—especially as she holds the money bags.

Ger. I don't see why! If she can scheme, so can we. And it shouldn't be very hard to devise some plan to force her to forego, anyway, her present intentions.

Glad. Oh, I know you're considered to be the brainy one of the family, but I doubt if even you will be clever enough to make her alter her views.

Ger. Well, anyway, we can have a try. (*Starting.*) And now we'd better go and get tidied up. Our redoubtable cousin may be here any minute.

Glad. Whom you have to marry!

Ger. (Xing R.). I certainly shan't—unless he turns out to be something extra extra.

Glad. Then, if he doesn't meet with your approval, you must expect to have continual wrangling with ma.

Ger. (pensively). N-no! (*eagerly*). I have it! I've just thought of something which I imagine will effectually dish her present plans.

Glad. Really! What is it?

Ger. Oh, it's still only in the embryonic state—but I fancy it will develop nicely. Come upstairs and I'll tell you all about it, and we can discuss the details whilst taking off our things.

Glad. But what good is it going to do me ?

Ger. Oh, you will derive just as much benefit as myself. I mean to kill two birds with one stone. Only you must do what I tell you ?

Glad. Certainly, if it shows any chance of success. But I——

Ger. (at door R.). No more ‘buts’ till you hear my idea. Come along !

Glad. Oh, all right ! (*Exeunt.*)

[*Momentary pause, then Hunt. speaks outside L.*]

Hunt. Will you step this way, please, sir—

(*Enters, followed by Sikes*).

and take a seat. Mrs. Loquetor will be back presently. She told me to tell you she was very sorry she ‘ad to go to her dressmaker, but that she wouldn’t be very long.

Sikes (C.). Oh, I don’t mind !—fact, all the better, as it’ll give us time to have a little friendly chat before she arrives. (*Suppresses yawn.*) First of all, what’s your name ?

Hunt. (L.C., surprised). ‘Unte, sir !

Sikes. I mean, Christian name ! They don’t call you ‘Unte in the kitchen, do they ?

Hunt. Oh, no ! Mary ! But——

Sikes. Mary ! h’m : not very haristocratic, but it suits your pretty face, m’ dear. My name’s Sikes—Chawlie Sikes !

Hunt. Yes, I know ! But——

Sikes. Know it, eh ? (*aside*). Oh, those registry orfice people, I suppose ! (*aloud*) Well, Mary, what sort o’ house is it ?

Hunt. (puzzled). What sort of 'ouse !

Sikes. I mean—is there much to do ? (*half yawns.*)

Hunt. Oh, I expect you'll find plenty to amuse you, sir !

Sikes. 'Ere, don't be so sarcastic. An' what are yer "sirring" me for ? Call me Chawlie like the rest of me pals.

Hunt. (stiffly). But I couldn't do no such thing and I——

Sikes. 'Course I don't mean when there's anyone around——

Hunt. Nor at any other time. I know my position.

Sikes. Oh, orlright, *if* yer wish to stand on ceremony ! (*yawns*) Sorry, but I was up late last night at a swarry. Well, what's the old woman like ?—free-'anded or stingy ?

Hunt (icily). Mrs. Loquetor treats us servants very well considering.

Sikes. Ah, that's something ! And 'ow's the grub ? —pretty middlin' ?

Hunt (indignantly). I don't know what yer trying to get at, sir, but if you've any more questions you'd better arsk the missus herself——

Sikes. 'Ere, I say ! don't get 'uffy—I didn't mean nothing disrespectful——

Hunt (ignoring him). Or p'raps the young ladies will tell you all you want to know. They'll be 'ere in a minute to entertain you. (*door L.*)

Sikes (amazed). Hentertain me ! What are yer givin' us, Mary ?

Hunt. My name's 'Unter, sir—and I requests while you're in the 'ouse you'll call me by it. (*Exits L.; bangs door.*)

Sikes (amazed). Whew! seems to me that gal's a bit balmy. If the rest of the house is like 'er it must be a queer set-out—and, by rotten luck, I ain't in a position to refuse anything arf way reasonable what's offered. Gosh! I'm tired—so I may as well take it easy till the old woman returns—sure to be a longish time if she's gone to 'er dressmaker—(*sits on settee L.*)—an' I feel pretty near played out. (*Yawns, stretches himself.*) Too blooming late hours last night—or rather this morning—but what a rippin' time—danced every bally dance—(*drowsily*)—an' Doris, the 'tween maid at old man Sawyers—was—just a peach. (*Eyes closed.*) Must try—to see—more of 'er—more—of—'er—(*falls asleep.*)

[*Momentary pause, then Ger. and Glad. enter R.*].

Ger. (R.C.). Oh, so you've arrived, Cousin Charles! We're sorry—(*Sikes snores*) Good gracious! he's gone to sleep.

Glad. (R. ironically). Tired out after his journey, poor thing!

Ger. Anyway, he might have managed to keep awake till . . . (*whispering*). Sh! I've just thought! he may be only shamming. Most probably he still keeps up that silly fad of practical joking that he used to be so fond of. But no matter! Real or shamming, now's the time to commence operations as it gives you the chance to establish your footing with him on a

more than ordinary friendly basis.

Glad. (surprised). What on earth do you mean?

Ger. Kiss him, of course, silly. And you'll win a pair of gloves into the bargain.

Glad. Don't be absurd! I can't kiss a total stranger.

Ger. (dragging her across to C.). Nonsense, he's your cousin. And it's just the thing to help our plan along.

Glad. But if he's only shamming, he'll think that—

Ger. (impatiently). No matter what he thinks—he's brought it on himself. Go ahead!

Glad. (back of settee). I wonder if he'll mind very much?

Ger. (C.). Try—and see!

Glad. (smiling). Oh, all right! (*kisses Sikes lightly on forehead*).

[*Sikes starts awake, stares, then springs up, girls laugh*].

Ger. Aha! we caught you, Cousin Charles—

Sikes (flustered). Beg pardon, m'em—afraid I dropped off for a minute. I 'ope you'll excuse me, m'em, but I was up late last night, and——

Ger. You do it awfully well, Charlie, but you won't be able to get out of it that way. You owe my sister a pair of gloves.

Sikes (mystified). Sister! gloves! what? (*X C.*)

Ger. (R.C.). You needn't pretend any more. She caught you asleep and kissed you.

Sikes. Kissed me? (*with wry smile*). Sorry, Miss but I think there's some mistake.

Glad. (L.C., demurely). No, Cousin Charles, there's no mistake. My lips came in contact with your forehead.

Sikes. But I don't understand, Miss! I suppose you're the young ladies of the 'ouse; but I ain't no cousin of yours—I'm only——

Ger. Oh, give over, Charlie—you can't gammon us—we know all about your *penchant* for practical joking, so it won't work.

Sikes. But I assure you——

Glad. Perhaps you intend to deny that your name's Sykes?

Sikes. Sikes is my name right enough, but——

Glad. Charlie Sykes?

Sikes. Chawlie Sikes, yes—but——

Ger. Then, *Chawlie* Sykes, further pretence—as they saw in melodrama—is useless. And as mother will be returning shortly we haven't any time to waste. We want you to do something for us.

Sikes. It strikes me I'd better do a bunk! (*Turns up. Girls close in on him and force him into chair C.*)

Ger. No, don't be absurd! Sit down here while I propound my scheme. And in case you've forgotten which is which—she's Gladys and I'm Geraldine.

Sikes (seated.) But I tell you——

Ger. Now, not another word till you hear what I have to say.

Sikes (resigned). Orlright, if you will 'ave it so! Go ahead—Ger'ldine.

Glad. Ah, that's better. And I only hope you'll

see your way to obliging us. It will relieve us of a lot of trouble, and it won't be for long.

Sikes. What won't be for long ?

Ger. (sitting on R. arm of his chair). Your engagement—if you agree to do as we wish.

Sikes. Oh, then, I'm to be engaged ?

Glad. (sitting on L. arm of his chair). Yes ; if you don't mind very much ?

Sikes. 'Course I don't ! That's what I came 'ere for.

Glad. (startled). What ! To get engaged to *me* ?

Sikes (amazed). To you ? 'Ere, what are yer givin' us ? (*half rises*).

Ger. (pushing him back). Be quiet, Charlie ; and don't play the fool—the matter's too serious. Listen ! mother has set her heart on Gladys marrying Paul Reardon, and keeps harping on the subject morning, noon and night. But Gladys doesn't want him—so we thought that if you wouldn't mind becoming engaged to her—just for the time being, you know—mother would have to stop her persecuting, and it would give my sister time to look about her. Understand ?

Sikes (amazed). What ! I'm to be 'er young man ?—walk out with 'er, and——

Glad. Only *pro. tem.* And then when I've found someone I really care for, we can break it off.

Sikes (smirking). But suppose Mr. Right never comes along ?

Glad. Oh, but he will—I'm sure he will.

Sikes. Well, it all seems crazy, but as you request it so particular, I suppose I must humour yer.

Glad. Oh, thanks awfully !

Sikes (airily). Don't mention it !

Ger. It is awfully good of you, Charlie ! But one thing !—you must pretend to be very much in love with Gladys when mother's anywhere around.

Sikes. Right oh ! But won't the missis—er—Mrs. Loqueter—think it rather quick work ?

Glad. Oh, love at first sight, you know ! Besides, we knew you as a boy.

Sikes. Oh, yer did, did yer ?

Ger. Yes. Surely you haven't forgotten ?

Siker (grinning). Oh, no—slipped me memory for the moment, that's all.

Ger (sharply). Don't try to be funny !

Sikes. I'm not ! But—er—where do you come in in the game—Ger'ldine ?

Ger. I'—oh ! Well, I'll be frank with you, Charlie. You see, mother has got it into her head that you'd be a good match for—me.

Sikes. Me—and you ! (grins).

Ger. Yes, she did—only—

Sikes. You didn't cotton, eh ?

Ger. I'm sorry, Charlie ; but the fact is, I've a young man of my own whom mamma doesn't know anything about—as yet.

Sikes. Why not tell 'er ?

Ger. Ineligible from her point of view.

Sikes. Oh ! not enough of a toff ! Well, I'll see yer

through it all right. Cawn't desert beauty in distress—even though you are all cracked.

Glad. But you must admit there's method in our madness.

Sikes. Might—if I could understand it at all.

Ger. You must be extremely dense if you can't. But anyway, you'll promise not to reveal our little plot to mother?

Sikes. Trust Chawlie! 'e won't give yer away.

Glad. Then *Chawlie's* a real good sort (*puts her arm over his shoulder*).

Ger. (doing the same). Yes—a real good sort—if you'd only give up this practical joking and silly way of speaking.

[*Enter Mrs. L. L.*]

Mrs. L. (surprised). Well, you two seem to have become on very friendly terms with your cousin during the short time he's been here. (*Advances to Sikes, who has risen*). How do you do, Charles! I hurried back at once as Madame Cécile couldn't see me—said I'd missed my appointment, the insolent creature—but I suppose I must put up with it, as no one can fit so well as she can. I hope you didn't mind my not being in to receive you, but——

Sikes. Oh, no—not in the least! And 'ow's yourself, m'em?

Mrs. L. (coldly). Quite well, thanks! But I wish you wouldn't use that common sort of language to me, Charles, though it seems to be the fashion to imitate the lower class nowadays in almost everything. This

new-fangled thing called Democracy, I suppose. Well, what do you think of my girls?—they were quite little tots when you saw them last.

Sikes. Fine! Ripping! (*X to Glad. L.C.*).

Mrs. L. I'm so glad you think so. (*Sits C.*) And though I say it myself, you couldn't find two better brought-up young ladies.

Ger. (sits R.C.). Oh, spare our blushes, mother!

Mrs. L. (severely). I see no reason to hide your light under a bushel. (*To Sikes.*) And you've no idea how handy Geradline is, Charles—she makes such a capital manager—relieves me of all responsibility——

Ger. Oh, I don't do much! Gladys looks after most of the housekeeping.

Mrs. L. (annoyed). I mean, she knows all about it and——

Ger. And so does Gladys!

Mrs. L. (angrily). Be quiet, Geraldine! I wish you wouldn't keep interrupting me whilst I'm talking—I can scarcely get a word in edgeways. (*To Sikes.*) Of course, I've trained *both* girls up in all domestic duties, so when they marry, their husbands can have no complaint to make in that direction.

(*Sikes, seated on sofa, places his hand on his heart, gives an audible sigh whilst making eyes at Gladys.*)

Mrs. L. Why, what's the matter, Charles?

Sikes. Ah! bliss—'eavenly bliss! (*Glad. nudges him indignantly.*)

Mrs. L. (amazed). Good gracious, what does the man mean?

Sikes. My 'eart's a flame with Love ! (*Sighs.*)

Glad (aside to him). Be quiet !

Sikes (puzzled). But you said——

Mrs. L. Love ! Rubbish ! What are you talking about ?

Sikes (ordinary voice). Nothing, only me and Gladys—er——

Mrs. L. (puzzled). Gladys ?

Glad (simpering). Yes—Charles and I— (*sighs*).

Ger. (rising). Perhaps I'd better explain, mother ! Naturally they're both rather flustered, and no wonder. It's this way : When Cousin Charles came I told him—perhaps I shouldn't have but I did—that you thought he would be a good match for me——

Mrs. L. (rising, horrified). You told him ! You !

Glad. (aside to Sikes). Say you were flattered !

Sikes. Very flattered I——

Mrs. L. (turning). Oh, Geraldine must have misunderstood, Charles. You can't possibly imagine that I——

Glad. Anyway, it doesn't matter, mother, as directly Charles saw me, I knew Geraldine stood no chance.

Mrs. L. What do you mean ? Have you both taken leave of your senses ?

Ger. No ! If anyone can be accused of imbecility, it's Cousin Charles—falling in love with Gladys at first sight.

Mrs. L. (astounded). What !

Ger. Yes—and he told her so.

Sikes (rising). True, m'em ! I got engaged to the

young lady—(X L.).

Mrs. L. Proposed after a quarter of an hour's acquaintance ?

Glad. (rising). I know it was rather sudden, mother ; but directly I saw him I fell in love with him, too. Besides, we knew him as a boy. And as you said he would be a good match I accepted him.

Ger. And after all, it isn't such *very* quick work—I mean, it's not a record—as only yesterday I was reading in the paper of a couple who were introduced, engaged, and married all inside half-an-hour—of course it was in America, but——

Glad. And I saw of a similar case in which it was all done within ten minutes—also in the States.

Mrs. L. (ironically). And do you propose to get married and settled inside of half-an-hour—or is it the ten minute limit ?

Glad. (X R.) Don't be absurd ! I expect our engagement to last some time.

Mrs. L. And suppose I refuse my consent ?

Ger. Oh, but you can't withdraw now after having said he was eligible.

Mrs. L. I don't see how it concerns you in any way, Geraldine ; and under ordinary circumstances I should have flatly refused. *But* on account of certain information which I received a few minutes ago, in confidence, from Miss Tatler—the old cat !—I not only give my consent, but heartily concur in the arrangement.

Glad (surprised). Why, what did she say ?

Mrs. L. Well, as you're now engaged to your cousin, it doesn't matter if I do repeat it before him. She stated that Paul Reardon had suddenly proposed to Fanny Brown—in a fit of pique at your coldness, I suppose!—and had promptly been accepted.

Glad (annoyed). That silly, giggling, Brown girl!

Mrs. L. I don't see why it should annoy you! You——

Glad. It doesn't! But I gave him credit for better taste than *that*.

Mrs. L. It's too late to repine now——

Glad. I'm not repining!

Mrs. L. And as that tittling-tattling woman insinuated at the same time that he had jilted you, the sooner you and your cousin are married the better. What do you say to this day month, Charles?

Sikes (startled). Married!

Glad. (startled). Month!

Mrs. L. (C.). What's the matter now? Neither of you seem very pleased.

Glad (hastily). Oh, we are! Of course we are! But a month seems a little too sudden, and——

Mrs. L. Not more than your engagement!

Ger. But she'll want some time to get her trousseau?

Mrs. L. That can easily be managed in the time specified.

Sikes (uncomfortably). But—'ow about me?

Mrs. L. A man can always get his things ready in less than a week if he wishes to.

Glad. But really, mother, I should require three months at least—if not six.

Mrs. L. Bosh ! I'll arrange it all for you. So this day month will see you both happily married. Charles, you can seal your betrothal with a kiss.

Sikes (diffidently). Y—Yes, m'em ! (*X C. advances to Glad—who retreats.*)

[*Enter Hunt., L. excitedly*].

Hunt. (bursting in). Please, ma'm, there's been some 'orrible mistake ! An outside porter's jest brought up Mr. Syke's luggage, an' 'e says that Mr. Syke's told 'im to tell you he were sorry the train was late, but that 'e'd be up in a few minutes, as 'e 'ad to send off some telegrams first.

Mrs. L. (amazed). What !

Ger. and Glad. (clutching each other). What ! Then you're not Cousin Charles ?

Sikes (indignantly). Of course I ain't ! I tried to explain but you wouldn't listen.

Mrs. L. Then who *are* you.

Sikes (C.). Chawlie Sikes, m'em !

Mrs. L. But you said just now you weren't !

Sikes. Pardon ! I said I wasn't no cousin of yourn. 'Taint my fault if there's another bloke of the same name, as you was expecting.

Hunt. It's my opinion 'e's a burglar, m'am ! 'E tried to pump me all about the 'ouse, and what you 'ad to eat, and——

Sikes (resentfully). I aint no such thing—I aren't no bloomin' burglar. I was sent up 'ere by the registry

orifice people for the job of footman. But if I'd known that this was a bally lunatic asylum I wouldn't 'a' come (*turns up*).

Mrs. L. (aghast). The new footman !

Glad. Footman !

Ger. Heavens ! what have we done ?

Mrs. L. Done, indeed ! (*to Glad*). You've engaged yourself to a footman—that's what you've done. And a nice mess you've got us all into.

Glad. But I thought he was my cousin ! And, anyway, I only got engaged to him for the time being.

Mrs. L. Time being ! What do you mean ?

Ger. (Xing C.). You forced us into it, mother, so you can't blame us. It was a plot Gladys and I concocted to offset your scheme of slinging Cousin Charles at my head——

Glad. And because you insisted on my marrying Paul.

Mrs. L. Well, your plots and your plans have landed us in a most lovely predicament. And, but for the timely arrival of Hunter you'd have been *kissed* by a—a menial ; and then——

Glad. Oh, horrors, I'd forgotten ! I've already kissed him.

Mrs. L. (astounded). What !

Glad. It was all Geraldine's fault—she suggested it.

Ger. Only because he was asleep—and that doesn't count.

Mrs. L. (horrificed). A footman asleep in my drawing room. Well, of all the——

Sikes (down L.C.). Sorry, m'em, but I was feeling all no-how after last night's swarry, and dropped off without knowin' it.

Mrs. L. (icily). Indeed ! (*to girls*) Well, upon my word this will be a most entertaining story for your cousin when it comes to his ears.

Glad. But he need never hear of it !

Ger. (defiantly). I don't mind if he does !

Mrs. L. But I do ! and there's nothing to prevent this—footman—from spreading the whole story round the town.

Sikes (grinning). It would be rather funny tellin', m'am, wouldn't it ?

Mrs. L. (furiously). Then you intend to do so, I suppose, unless I——

Sikes (X C., quietly). No m'am : Chwlie Sikes ain't that kind. I only——

Ger. I didn't think you were !

Glad. I'm sure you aren't !

Sikes (gratefully). Thank you both, Miss ! And now I'd better clear as— (*to Mrs. L.*) after what's happened, you won't want to engage me *now* !

Mrs. L. Of course I won't !

Sikes (about to go). Sorry—as I've been out of a job for some time—an' I've an ole mother who 'as only what I can give 'er—and—

Ger and Glad. (to Mrs. L., in expostulation). Mother !

Mrs. C. Be quiet ! (*to Sikes*). I can't engage you myself for obvious reasons ; but I know an old lady who would engage you on my recommendation——

Sikes (elated). Oh, thank yer, m'em !

Mrs. L. As a coachman—if you can manage horses

Sikes. Coachman ! Crikey ! Yes, m'em, I was brought up in a livery stable. Thank you, m'em !
(*Xing to L.*). Thank you, both, Miss ! Chawlie Sikes will never forget you—never ! Good-day, m'em ! Good-day, Miss, both.

[*Exits—Hunter holding open door L.*]

CURTAIN.

PRIDE

A Play in One Act.

CHARACTERS:

DICK RALSTON.

ELLA RALSTON (*His Wife*).

MISS DEARLY (*Her Aunt*).

MAJOR DENSON (*His Uncle*).

MINNA (*A Maid*).

SCENE:

Poorly but neatly furnished room. Doors L.C. back and R. Small table C. back,—chair to L. of it. Writing desk and chair L. Settee R.C. and easy chair L.C.

At rise of curtain, Ella is seated R.C. mending an old coat of Dick's—Dick pacing to and fro L.C. moodily.

Dick. It's no use, Ella!—we can't go on like this much longer. Something will have to be done! Although we have cut down our expenses to the very lowest ebb, we're now practically at the end of our resources.

Ella (*surprised*). But we've managed to get along somehow up to the present—even if not *very* comfortably—so why——

Dick. I don't think you quite grasp the situation, dear ! I—*(with an outburst turning off to L.)* Oh, I was a selfish beast to marry you—I——

Ella (startled). Dick ! What are you saying ?

Dick. Yes, I mean it. I ought never have asked you to tie yourself to me till I had sufficient funds to provide you with a proper home.

Ella (severely). Dick, I won't listen to another word if you go on like that. You have nothing to blame yourself for ! *(Rising crosses to him).* I was just as much a culprit in the matter as you—perhaps more so, you silly old thing—if you only knew——

Dick. But confound it, Ella, I should have realized what a very precarious income it was I had to offer you—outside my private hundred a year—but I was so blinded with faith and optimism at the success of my one novel and two short stories, that I imagined my fortune was made. *(Angrily.)* Then came that infernal illness three months ago which seems to have knocked what little brains I ever possessed into thin air.

Ella (on settee with coat). But no one can help an illness, dear !

Dick. Of course not ! But the fault lay in my not allowing for such a contingency—or rather, in purposely ignoring it as I—I—*(Glances at her.)*

Ella (softly). As you wanted me ? Well, I'm glad you did.

Dick. Ella ! But look what I've dragged you down to ! It's evident you don't know the worst—*(Pulls*

out note)—one five pound note left, and—(*crosses to desk, hold up envelopes*) bill—bill—bill ! (*Drops disconsolately into chair.*)

Ella (dropping work, crosses to him). Oh, but your quarterly dividends are due next week—Twenty-five pounds.

Dick (bitterly). A long way they will go to pay *these*—less than half. Besides there are the taxes—the Doctor's fees—and Minna's wages. The truth is, ruin is staring us in the face.

Ella (recoiling dismayed). Oh, Dick !

Dick (rising). Ah, now you understand ! (*Crossing R.C.*) I was a sel——

Ella (L.C.). Don't dare to say that again ! Sit down and we'll talk the matter over quietly. (*Slight catch in her voice on last word—crosses, sits R.C.*)

Dick (despondently). I don't see the use—talking won't provide us with the necessities of life. If only my confounded brain hadn't——

Ella. Mere waste of time cavilling at Fate ! Try to think of some way out of the difficulty.

Dick (sitting beside her). My dear Ella, if my brain were capable of such a task at the present moment, we would never have been landed in this predicament. As well ask me to——

Ella. No matter ! Try to think of—anything. (*Takes up mending.*)

Dick (irritably). What's the good ? The only way I can suggest, is, that you might write to your Aunt, Miss Dearly, and——

Ella (horrified). Aunt Marion! Beg from her? Impossible!

Dick (admiringly). Of course it is! I knew it when I proposed the thing. You would rather starve than be under an obligation to anyone—even to the nearest and dearest of your relations.

Ella (hastily). Oh, no—it's not that at all! but—poor Aunt Marion isn't at all well off—only about three hundred a year at most——

Dick (enviously). A very good income for an old maiden lady!

Ella. Oh, no!—she requires a lot of little comforts—and I couldn't bear to think she should be deprived of any of them. Besides, she has already given us so much that—I wouldn't like to ask for more.

Dick (gloomily). Well, that settles it—unless you have something to suggest.

Ella (eagerly). Oh, I know! Why shouldn't you write to your uncle, Major Denson and——

Dick. What! I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing! (*Rises.*)

Ella. I don't see why not! You might ask it as a loan to tide us over our present difficulties—and as he's very well off——

Dick (hastily). Yes, but I know scarcely anything of him—he's always lived out in India—and it would look too much like cadging.

Ella. Not at all—if you told him about your illness—that it wasn't your fault, simply bad luck. He must think well of you or he wouldn't have sent us such a

valuable wedding present when we were married.

Dick. But he left India for England over a fortnight ago, and I don't know where he intends to put up. And although the present was right enough, he, at the same time, wrote me a curt little note saying I was a damn fool to marry a penniless girl.

Etta (starting up; very hurt). Dick!

Dick (clasping her; penitently). Oh, I'm so sorry, darling! I never intended to tell you. But what does it matter, when we both know it to be utterly false. So don't take it to heart like that.

Ella (clinging to him; sobs). Oh, Dick, it's all my fault—I ought never to have married you.

Dick. Nonsense, dear! Don't be a little goose. What should I have done without you? (*Assuming a light manner;*) Now I'll cut across the garden and go and try to placate some of these tradesmen—and I'll also order the things you wanted—or else we shan't have any dinner. (*Kisses her; turns and crosses R.*)

Ella. All right, Dick! And I'll try to think of some means to— (*He nods to her and exits*). To——

[*Crosses to table, falls into chair, lays her head on table and bursts into tears*].

Ruin! Ruin! (*Sobs audibly*.)

[*Enter Minna, ushering in Miss Dearly L.C., after a few seconds' pause*].

Minna (entering). Miss Dearly, ma'm!

[*Ella does not hear her. Miss Dearly motions Minna away, closes the door, crosses to Ella, lays her hand gently on her shoulder*].

Ella (raising her head). Oh, I'm sorry, Dick—
(*turning her head*). I thought you had— (*Starts up.*)
Aunt Marion !

Miss Dearly. Yes, it's I, dear ! I've taken you by surprise, haven't I ? But first, tell me what's troubling you ? Why do I find you—

Ella (hastily). Oh, it's nothing, Auntie—only Dick and I—

Miss Dearly (severely). Has he been ill-treating you ?

Ella (indignantly). Of course not ! He's always most kind and considerate.

Miss Dearly. Then what were you crying for ?

Ella (leading her down C., evasively). Oh, I don't know—I'm a little overwrought, that's all ; and I haven't been feeling very well lately. But what has brought you down here, Auntie ? Take off your things.
(*Helps her.*)

Miss Dearly. Thanks, dear ! (*Sitting on settee*). Well, the truth is—I heard that you and Dick were—how shall I say it—er—that things hadn't been going very well with you lately.

Ella (sitting L.C. Coldly). Indeed ! In what way ?

Miss Dearly (discomposed). I meant—er—financially.

Ella (in a hard tone). Oh, we're all right, thanks ! Of course, we can't indulge in luxuries, but—we manage to get along very well.

Miss Dearly (imploring). Ella, darling, don't assume that icy manner with me. It's all very well for you to deny it, but I know my information is correct,

and——

Ella (rising angrily). Who has dared to gossip about our affairs ?

Miss Dearly. Your old nurse, Martha, who lives about a couple of miles from here, wrote to me——

Ella. I wish she would mind her own business. I never heard of such impertinence !

Miss Dearly (rising to her). Don't say that, child ! Remember she did it solely for love of you. Although laying herself open to a rebuff—as she knew nothing of me personally—she put her own feelings in the matter to one side, and told me the whole truth. (*Softly.*) I wish you would do the same, dear.

Ella (slightly mollified). But how can she know anything about us ?

Miss Dearly. It's common knowledge throughout the town.

Ella (uncomfortably). But—I've nothing to tell——

Miss Dearly. Oh, pride, pride ! it's been the curse of our family. (*Leading Ella to settee.*) Sit down by me, child—till I tell you a little story ! (*Sighs*)—and listen attentively. (*Both sit*). “About thirty years ago, a young girl out in India fell in love with a subaltern in a line regiment, and he with her. The girl was practically penniless, but he with his pay had enough to provide for them both, with economy, and the girl was only too willing to share his lot. So for a few days everything appeared rosy and bright ; but then came the news that his parents absolutely refused their consent to the engagement—principally, I think,

because she had no money—though they didn't actually state the reason. This angered the young man to such an extent that he begged and implored the girl to marry him at once—in spite of his parents' opposition ; but her pride was up in arms, and her only reply was, that she would never marry into a family where she wasn't wanted. That was the last time she ever saw him. The girl is now a lonely old woman, dear, but the pride she set before her heart, has long since crumbled away, while her affection remains as strong as ever, though all hope was abandoned years ago." So you see, my dear——

Ella (touched). Oh, Auntie ! You !—you poor old thing !

Miss Dearly. Hush ! I deserved it. I was only showing you what pride—false pride—carried to an extreme may lead one into.

Ella. Oh, but our cases are different—and I knew you weren't any too well off yourself, Auntie, so—of course—I couldn't——

Miss Dearly. Only your pride making excuses for you, child ! Tell me all about it.

Ella. All ! (*Breaking down, throws her arms round Miss Dearly's neck*). We—we're ruined—we've nothing left—scarcely enough to eat—and——

Miss Dearly. And you would have starved before you said a word ?

Ella. Oh, but you don't understand—I——

Miss Dearly. Yes, I do, dear—I know exactly how you felt about it. But it only required a little moral

courage to overcome your sensitiveness—like anything else. Now I won't lecture you any more, so dry your eyes, child, and—tell me! Can you put me up for a couple of days? I took it for granted that you would be able to oblige me, so I brought my trunk along, and left it at the station.

Ella (rising). Of course, Auntie!—you know you're welcome to anything we possess—and our spare room is vacant, so——

Miss Dearly. Thanks, dear! You won't find me much trouble; and, oh! may I send your maid out for a few necessaries I require?

Ella. Certainly! I'll call her. (*Crosses to door L.C.*) Minna!

Minna (outside). All right! Comin' ma'm!

Miss Dearly (nervously). The fact is—I haven't been very well lately and—my doctor has ordered me to eat only certain things—(*Wistfully*). So you don't mind my having them sent in?

Ella. Of course not! Anything you require—

Miss Dearly (pained). Ella, I believe you're wilfully trying to cause me pain. (*Decisively*.) I won't beat about the bush any longer. You're going to share everything no, it's no use your mounting your high horse again. . . . After all, why shouldn't you give an old woman the pleasure—you and Dick——

Ella (overcome). Oh, Auntie, don't put it that way—I'm an ungrateful——

[*Enter Minna L.C.*]

Miss Dearly. Hush! Here's the maid. Run along

and see about my room—I'll follow you in a minute—
(*Urges her towards door R.*)—and then I must lie down
for a bit.

Ella. Very well, Auntie ! It will be ready for you
when you come.

[*Exit R.*].

Miss Dearly (*Crossing up L.C. back*). Thanks dear.
Oh, Minna, I'd like you to do a little shopping for me if
you don't mind. Here is a list of the things I want—
and here's more than enough to pay for them. (*Gives
list and bank-note.*) Be very particular that everything's
of the best, and that you get the right kind of port-
wine.

Minna (*takes money, looks at slip*). Very good,
ma'm—I'll go at once. (*In astonishment.*) What !
all these, ma'am ?

Miss Dearly. Yes, yes ! Also call at the station
and engage a porter to bring my trunk here, will you ?

Minna. All right, ma'am !

Miss Dearly. Now show me to the spare-room.

Minna. This way, ma'am !

[*Exeunt R. Slight pause*].

Dick (*outside L.C.*). Good heavens ! Who'd have
dreamed of seeing you here, Uncle ? I didn't know
you'd even arrived in England—and now I find you
on our doorstep. Come in !

[*Enter Major Denson, followed by Dick, L.C.*].

Major (*speaks gruffly*). Thanks ! Unexpected visitor
eh ? But I—well, I thought I'd—er—just run down

to see how you were getting on. A'hm !

Dick (stiffly). Oh, we're doing very well, thanks ! Sit down, won't you ? (*Indicates chair L.C.*). But how did you know we'd moved to this part of the world ?

Major. Oh—er—a friend of yours—er—I mean, I made enquiries on my arrival in town, and was told your address. (*Abruptly*). How's the wife ? (*Glances with a disapproving look round the room.*)

Dick. Quite well, thanks ! I expect she'll be down in a minute. I'll call her, shall I ? (*Crosses R.*)

Major (hastily). No, no ! Time enough ! Not much of a place you've got here, Dick !

Dick (C.). Plenty large enough for only us two.

Major (sitting L.C., glances at him keenly). H'm ! and how's the scribbling ? Made your fortune yet, eh ?

Dick (uncomfortably). Well—not exactly ! Fact is—I've been rather seedy for a while, so I've been obliged to chuck it for the time being.

Major (sharply). Then how do you manage to live ?

Dick (evasively). Oh, I made a—a fair sum on my book, and—(*brightly*)—of course I've my hundred a year.

Major. Not much to go upon !

Dick (stiffly). We scrape along all right, thanks !

Major (ironically). Glad to hear it ! (*Altering his tone*). But hang it, Dick, you don't seem a very hospitable sort of chap ! Here have I taken all the trouble to come down to this god-forsaken hole, to see

you, by gad ! and you haven't so much as offered me a glass of sherry and a biscuit.

Dick. Oh, I'm sorry, Uncle—but I'm afraid we haven't any sherry in the house—just at present. Of course, if I'd known you were coming——

Major. No matter ! A brandy or whiskey peg will do as well.

Dick (fidgeting). Er—I'm afraid we haven't any spirits—either.

Major. None ! Well, give me anything you've got—my throat's parched.

Dick. I—I regret, Uncle—I mean—we haven't any sort of liquor—Ella and I—we only drink water now.

Major. Eh ?—become teetotal cranks ? By gad, I thought you'd be just the sort of fellow who'd enjoy a glass of good wine.

Dick. So I do—that is—Ella and I think we're better without it. Of course, if you'd like to have a biscuit——

Major. Faugh ! it would choke me. Well, never mind ! I can send out for what I shall require while I'm here.

Dick (puzzled). Here ! I'm afraid I don't quite understand.

Major (rising). Understand, sir ! Why, it seems I shall have to beg to be allowed to be put up for a couple of days, instead of being pressed and invited to do so—as I fully expected.

Dick (flabbergasted). You're going to stay with us for a couple of days ?

Major (huffily). Such was my intention when I started from town, but as you seem so——

Dick. Oh, I beg your pardon, Uncle ! Of course you're very welcome to our spare room, and Ella will be delighted to meet you—only—only——

Major. Only what, sir ?

Dick. I mean—that I don't know if our food will be entirely suitable to—to your constitution.

Major (mollified). Oh, is that all ? (*Resumes his seat*). You may make your mind easy on that score. Owing to my long residence in India, I can only eat certain things—ah'm ! curries—chillies—chutneys—anything hot. But, of course, I shall provide all necessaries and whatever else I may require—myself. It wouldn't be right to put you to the expense !

Dick (aside ; glancing surreptitiously at his £5 note). Thank goodness !

[*Major Denson watching him sees expression of relief on his face*].

Major (continuing). The only thing is, they must be well cooked. You have a good cook, I presume ?

Dick. Oh—er—yes ! Of course she's rather plain—er——

Major (surprised). I don't care two straws about her looks !

Dick. I didn't mean that !—she can do plain cooking. Oh I forgot ! Ella can help—she's A1. in the kitchen.

Major. All right then ! (*Rising*). If you're sure I'm not putting you out, I'll have my travelling case

sent up from the station.

Dick. Oh, I'll arrange that for you, Uncle,—don't you trouble.

Major (gruffly). Thanks ! But I prefer to attend to it myself—these porter fellows are so infernally careless—and oh,—ah ! I can order my—er—requirements at the same time.

Dick. Very well ! But you'll wish to see Ella before you start ?

Major (hastily). No,—going at once !—time enough when I return. (*Turns up L.C.*). This the way out ?

Dick. Yes, straight ahead. I'll come *with* you, shall I ?

Major. No, I don't want you.

Dick (opening door for him, huffily). Oh, very well !

Major (in doorway). Back inside an hour ! (*Exits L.C. back.*)

Dick (closing door). The old curmudgeon ! He seems to have taken a dislike to my poor Ella (*Joyfully*). But anyway I expect we'll have a jolly good feed to-night. The old boy evidently knows how to do himself well.

[*Enter Ella, R., sees Dick, rushes up to him, very pleased*].

Ella. Oh Dick ! Such luck !

Dick (C.L.). Then you've already heard the good news ?

Ella (surprised). Yes, of course ! But how did you know of it ? I thought you had been out !

Dick. So I have ! It was just as I was coming in —

Ella. Oh, you met Minna ? (*Crosses L.C., sits.*)

Dick (astonished). Minna ! No ! He was standing on the doorstep and about to ring the bell, when I came up and recognized him.

Ella (amazed). Him ! Who ?

Dick. Why, Uncle Arthur—Major Denson, of course—Just home from India.

Ella. What ! is he here ?

Dick. Yes, but you said you knew ! (*Sits on arm of her chair.*)

Ella. I didn't ! I was alluding to my Aunt Marion.

Dick. Great Scott ! You don't mean to say she's arrived, too ?

Ella. Yes ; she came directly you had left—I wonder you didn't meet her. (*Joyfully.*) And what do you think, Dick ! She's sent Minna out for all sorts of provisions and delicacies—said she had to, as she was only allowed to eat and drink certain things, and—

Dick (interrupting). Just what my Uncle said—and he's gone to fetch his.

Ella (continuing). And she insists on our sharing them. Oh Dick, we shall have one or two good meals, at least——

Dick. By Jove ! We'll have a regular banquet to-night if the old boy also insists on our sharing his.

Ella. Yes, won't we ? (*Seriously.*) But we must be careful, Dick, and not eat too much, or your Uncle may begin to suspect our—straightened circumstances.

Dick. Your Aunt, also !

Ella (shamefacedly). Oh—she—knows !

Dick. What !

Ella. Yes. She literally forced me to tell her the truth. And oh, Dick, I never felt so mean and small in all my life when I had to confess.

Dick (rising to C.). Only your dignity receiving a slap, little woman. Of course it hurt.

Ella (indignantly). You needn't talk. It was only your vanity that stood in the way of your acting on my suggestion, that you should write to your Uncle.

Dick (crossing to desk, sits). Rot ! There's no beastly pride about me. I gave you the real reasons at the time. (*Altering his tone.*) But how's your Aunt going to get back to-night if she's to be here for dinner ? There's no train——

Ella. Oh, but she's not going—she has decided to stay with us for a couple of days, and I've got the spare-room ready for her.

Dick (half-rising, astounded). What ! Good Lord ! Of all the confounded luck !—

Ella (amazed). Why, what's the matter ?

Dick (laughing mirthlessly). Only that I told Uncle he was welcome to our spare-room for the two nights he'll be here.

Ella (rising to C.). Good gracious ! Then what are we to do ? We can't turn either of them out.

Dick. Sure I don't know ! It's impossible even to arrange it on the Box-and-Cox system. It seems to me the only question is, which one will have to give way ?

Ella (crosses R.C.). If either should have to go it would be, of course, your Uncle ; but as——

Dick. But, Ella, he's a regular Croesus, now ! (Crosses to her.) He made a pot of money out of some speculation in India after he'd left the army—so if we treat him decently he might take it into his head to—to remember us in his will. But if we turn him out——

Ella (decisively, sitting on settee). That wouldn't matter ! Auntie should stay on in any case. I never knew what a dear old soul she was until to-day. And oh, Dick, she's had such a lot of trouble in her life—she told me something of it this afternoon.

Dick (sitting by her). Oh, that alters the case ! Affection before money, any day ! And *she* can't think we're trying to sponge on her. But it will be rather a shame having to turn the old buffer away after all the trouble he's taken to come and see us. By-the-by, I wonder what really brought him down—and in such a hurry too ?—he's been scarcely forty-eight hours in England, and——

Ella (indifferently). I don't know ! But there's really no question of turning either of them out. As we've made them both welcome, they'll both have to stay.

Dick. But how are we to manage ?

Ella. Oh, that's simple ! Major Denson must have our room.

Dick. But he'll think we're putting ourselves out purposely to get into his good graces. He doesn't seem to like you !

Ella. No, he won't ! I'll see that everything of ours is moved upstairs. So he won't know it isn't another spare-room we've got.

Dick. But where are we to go ?—get lodgings in the town ? That won't work.

Ella. Of course not, you old silly ! We'll occupy Minna's room in the attic, and she can sleep in the kitchen.

Dick. She'll probably object—and anyway it's so small—

Ella (decidedly). It will have to do ! And I'm sure Minna will oblige me—she's such a good-natured soul.

Dick. Oh, well, have your own way ! But we must be careful he doesn't hear of the exchange.

Ella. Don't be afraid, I'll arrange it so that he can't suspect.

Dick (admiringly, rising). Jove ! You *are* a smart little woman, Ella ! I'd like to wring that old curmudgeon's neck for saying I was a damn——

[Enter Major Denson, L.C., breathing heavily].

Major (entering). It's all right, Dick—my case will be here in a minute or two——

Dick (C.). Oh, you're back again, Uncle ! Here's Ella, you haven't made her acquaintance yet !

Ella (advancing shyly). How do you do ?

Major (L.C., starts—sotto voce). Good God !

Dick (surprised). Why, what's the matter, Uncle ?

Major (recovering). Nothing—nothing ! Merely a fancied resemblance, I suppose ! Your wife, Dick, reminded me for the moment of someone I knew—

many years ago.

Dick. Oh, indeed !

Ella (*curiously*). I did ?

Major (*brushing his hand over his eyes*). Yes, my dear. (*Reminiscently*). Very many years ago. (*Abruptly ; crossing C.*) What was your maiden name, child ?

Ella (*surprised*). Ella Prinsett !

Major (*disappointed*). Ah ! merely a coincidence, then ! (*To himself*). But it's queer, very queer !

Dick (*L.C., a little up*). Could you get all you required in the town, Uncle ?—the shops aren't very good, I know, but——

Major. Eh ? Yes, Dick, it's all right ! I expect you'll have a number of deliveries within the next hour or so—but so many things were wanted—curries—game—champagne— (*With forced gaiety*). I say, Dick ! We'll have a feast to-night to welcome the wanderer home ? Eh, Ella ?

Ella (*stiffly*). It's awfully kind of you, Uncle—but I'm sorry you've been obliged to go to any expense when you're our guest—but we didn't know you were coming to pay us a visit or we would have—er—we might have— Why, didn't you write and tell us to expect you ?

Major (*who has been gazing at her in wonder ; fiercely*). What ! You too ?

Ella (*aghast*). Uncle, what do you mean ? What's the matter ? (*Contritely*). I hope I didn't say anything to offend you ?

Major (recovering). No, no—only you again reminded me of—someone. You must forgive an old man his whims and fancies.

Dick. Oh, it's all right, Uncle—you're a bit tired, I expect. By the way, I don't think you know we've got another visitor in the house—Ella's Aunt. Like you, she turned up quite unexpectedly this afternoon, and is also going to remain a couple of days. (*Turns up.*)

Major. I shall be delighted to meet her. But how can you manage to squeeze us all in? Judging from the exterior of the house you can't possibly have—

Ella (hastily). Oh, yes, Uncle, we have—there's plenty of room for us all. Auntie's just lying down for a little, but she'll be—

[*Enter Miss Dearly, R.*].

Oh, here she is! (*Crossing to her.*) Auntie, we've got another unexpected guest—Dick's Uncle—come and be introduced—Major—

[*Major Denson L.C. turns. Miss Dearly R.C., about to advance, stops suddenly.*]

Miss Dearly (faintly). Arthur!

Major (astounded). Marion!

Dick (up L., surprised). What! You know each other?

Ella (R. of Miss Dearly). You've met before?

Major (solemnly crossing C.). Many years ago!

Miss Dearly (crossing C.). More than thirty!

[*They gaze at each other intently. Ella gives a surprised "Oh!" moves swiftly across to Dick, drags him off L.C. back.*]

Major (aside). God ! that accounts for the resemblance. (*Aloud.*) Marion, you're the last person I ever expected to meet on this earth.

Miss Dearly (choking). I'm sorry, Major Denson, but I couldn't help it——

Major (gladly). Sorry ! It's more than I am. All these years you have never been out of my thoughts. But your pride—the pride that separated us and has since kept us apart, has——

Miss Dearly (meekly). Has been shattered long ago, Arthur !

Major (pleased). Really and truly ?

Miss Dearly. On my word of honour. But why talk of what happened ages ago ?—it can do no good now. Tell me, what brought you down——

Major. Before we go into that, I'd like you to answer me one question which I think I have a right to ask.

Miss Dearly. I'll answer it with pleasure—for old times' sake !

Major. Then—have you—er—retained any—memory of——

Miss Dearly (quietly). Your image has never been effaced from my heart.

Major. Marion !

Miss Dearly (stopping him with a gesture). Oh, I don't mind your knowing how I've always regarded you since we are now both much too old to indulge in mock modesty or sentiment.

Major (brusquely). No matter about that ! Answer me truly ; if it were possible to live your life over again,

would you have acted differently ?

Miss Dearly (very humbly). Y—yes, Arthur.

Major (overjoyed). You would ? Marion, I never intend to let you out of my sight again—now I've found you.

Miss Dearly (turning away, nervously). Nonsense, Major ! You and I can't begin to play at being young lovers at our time of life.

Major (aghast). You mean you——

Miss Dearly (firmly). I mean it would be absurd for us now to be anything more than—friends.

Major. What, Marion !—after all these years ?

Miss Dearly. It's just on that account. I'm only a broken down old woman——

Major (bitterly). And I—a lonely old man !

Miss Dearly (hastily). Besides, I find I have other interests now to attend to—a duty to perform.

Major. By gad, it seems as if I had, too ! But that needn't interfere with——

Miss Dearly. But it would in my case—it will take up all my time. (*Sits R.C., on settee.*) Now, tell me how you happened to arrive just on the same day as——

Major. My duty, too I suppose !—duty to my dead sister. (*Sits by her.*) I found a note waiting for me at my club, the day after I arrived in town, signed by a person calling herself Martha,—Ella's old——

Miss Dearly (comprehensively). Oh !

Major. What's the matter ?

Miss Dearly. Nothing ! Go on !

Major. Well, she said Dick had had a bad illness

and had got into low water—in fact, was on bedrock—and implored me to do something for them. So off I started post-haste this morning, and found—my nephew and niece on the verge of ruin. Did you know of it, Marion ?

Miss Dearly. Yes—it was practically the same story that brought me here. I discovered that they would rather starve in silence than utter one word.

Major (eagerly). Then *they* were the interests you spoke of ?

Miss Dearly. Yes.

Major. But they are mine also—so our duty is clear. We must take them under our wing.

Miss Dearly (wavering). But——

Major. It's no good making further objection, Marion. You must see that it's the only thing we can do under the circumstances—and Ella and Dick shall be *our* children. They want looking after, as poor Dick will never be of much use, again—I saw his doctor on my way up from the station, and *he* told me. So it's our bounden duty to take care of them. Will you consent, dear ?

Miss Dearly (giving way). Oh, Arthur—if you really want me——

Major. I've wanted you all my life, Marion !

Kisses her on forehead, then jumps up suddenly and shouts.

Dick, Dick ! You young rascal, come here at once !
(*Opens door L.C. back speaks off*). You also, Ella !
What do you mean by deserting your guests in this

manner ? A nice way to treat your relations.

[*Enter Dick, followed by Ella*].

Dick (*entering*). Why, whatever's the matter, Uncle ? You——

Ella (*coming down L.*). You look quite transformed !

Major (*C.*). So I am, by gad ! (*Turning on Dick, L. of him.*) Now, sir, what the deuce did you mean by not letting me know of your financial position ?—or rather, your *non-financial* state ?

Dick (*aghast*). Then you knew ?

Major. Of course I did ! Otherwise, what would have brought me to this hole ?

Dick (*halting*). Oh, I—I couldn't very well—after you calling me a damn fool——

Major. Ah ! Merely standing on your dignity, eh ? Not a case of pride ?

Dick. Oh, no—of course not——

Ella. Certainly not ! We haven't any really, although Auntie——

[*Enter Minna, L.C., very flurried*].

Minna. Please, ma'am—oh, please, ma'am—you won't be able to sleep in my room in the attic to-night as all the ceiling's come down. (*C. back.*)

Miss Dearly (*rising*). Attic !

(*Bus. Ella and Minna up C.*)

Major. What does the girl mean ? (*To Ella.*) You said you had plenty of room—gave me to understand you had at least two *spare-rooms* ? (*Turning on Dick.*) Explain, sir !

Ella (*coming down R. of Major.*). It was all my fault,

Uncle ! You see, we couldn't very well turn either of you out after saying you were welcome, so we—we had to arrange as best we could.

Major. There was nothing to prevent you telling me the truth !

Dick (uncomfortably). You might have thought we were—were——

Ella. Purposely putting ourselves out to—to——

Dick. —Get into your——

Ella, Dick (together). Good graces.

Major. Good lord !

Miss Dearly (despairingly). Oh, children, you're hopeless.

Major (crossing to her). No matter ! We'll cure them—or we'll know the reason why. (*Severely.*) For the future, you're both going to be under *our* charge—Miss Dearly's and mine—or rather, I should say—under Major and Mrs. Denson's.

Ella (flying across to Miss Dearly). Oh, Auntie, I'm so glad—I mean for your having found—

Miss Dearly (blinking). One of the best men that ever lived. (*Kisses her.*)

[*Dick shakes hands warmly with his Uncle.*]

Dick. I'm sorry, Uncle—but I'm afraid I've misjudged you.

Major. Then you must show it—by coming to live with us.

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